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Revival and the Unregenerate Church Member

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When George Whitefield, the prominent English-born evangelist of the First Great Awakening, was asked why he so often preached, "Ye must be born again," he replied, "Because, ye must be born again!"

Regeneration, or the new birth, was the prevalent issue of the Great Awakening of the 1740s in America. Joseph Tracey, in *The Great Awakening* (1842), said:

> This doctrine of the "new birth," as an ascertainable change, was not generally prevalent in any communion when the revival commenced; it was urged as of fundamental importance, by the leading promoters of the revival; it took strong hold of those whom the revival affected; it naturally led to such questions as the revival brought up and caused to be discussed; its perversions naturally grew into, or associated with, such errors as the revival promoted; it was adapted to provoke such opposition, and in such quarters, as the revival provoked; and its caricatures would furnish such pictures of the revival, as oppressors drew. This was evidently the right key; for it fitted all the wards of the complicated lock.[1]

This doctrine has repeatedly been at the heart of awakenings. The more objective doctrine, justification, has also played significantly in revival. Edwards, for instance, was preaching a series on justification by faith alone in Northampton when God came to that village. A correct

understanding of both is needed in our day. My focus is on the former and the dilemma that has been created (and is exponentially growing) due to the unregenerate church members among us. I wish to emphasize that preaching regeneration in the style and comprehension of the former preachers of revival is precisely what must be done immediately in order to "awaken" a professing church, drunk with the silliness of entertaining our unregenerate souls to hell.

By regeneration we mean the giving of life to dead souls by a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. Berkhof says it is "that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy."

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This doctrine was preached with a certain edge. It was expressed with the rational thought that if one claims to be regenerate, then that individual should and would demonstrate the fruit of that life in such a manner as to verify the salvation he claimed to possess. J.C. Ryle said in so many

words that the awakening preachers of that time believed in an indivisible union between authentic faith and holiness. "They never allowed for a moment that any church membership or religious profession was the least proof of a man being a Christian if he lived an ungodly life."[3] Therefore it became the prevalent method of proclamation to treat conversion in a more serious manner than we do today by causing the professor of faith in Christ to examine his life for the marks of true salvation.

This method, fed by the Puritan theology of better days, brought great conviction and massive numbers of conversions when preached with the unction of the Spirit in times of revival. Where it did not bring conviction, it brought anger. Whitefield, who himself was written *against* in more than 240 tracts of various types[4], said that when you heard Middle Colonies' preacher Gilbert Tennent (and his brothers) you were either converted or enraged. According to Gillies' quoting of Prince in *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*, Tennent is said to have preached in this way:

> Such were the convictions wrought in many hundreds in this town by Mr. Tennent's searching ministry; and such was the case of those many scores of several other congregations as well as mine, who came to me and others for direction under them. And indeed by all their converse I found, it was not so much the terror as the searching nature of his ministry, that was the principal means of their conviction. It was not merely, nor so much, his laying open the terrors of the law and wrath of God, or damnation of hell (for this they could pretty well bear, as long as they hoped these belonged not to them, or they could easily avoid them), as his laying open their many vain and secret shifts and refuges, counterfeit resemblances of grace, delusive and damning hopes, their utter impotence, and impending danger of destruction; whereby they found all their hopes and refuges of lies to fail them, and themselves exposed to eternal ruin, unable to

> help themselves, and in a lost condition. This searching preaching was both the suitable and principal means of their conviction.[5]

Hundreds of people came to the pastors in those days after Gilbert Tennent preached on his early preaching tour, more than most of the pastors had ever seen in their entire ministries.

Revival preaching is not pacific preaching, though it is to be delivered with humility and compassion for the hearers. The *content* of revival preaching often divides, or as Christ said, "brings a sword." Because we are unwilling to preach in an impassioned way the truth about the unregenerate state of so many of our members, we forfeit revival conviction without an effort. Yet, the kind of preaching that is well accepted by the uncommitted and is in total dissimilarity with Christ's is most prevalent in our day.

"The world loves its own," said Christ. If you are one of those bland and colorless preachers who is merely a story teller or an entertainer, or one who gives out devotional talks when the very people you are addressing are among those closest to hell, then you might be the very kind Paul was warning about when he talked of preachers who "tickle the ears." Regeneration and, for that matter, justification by faith alone are doctrines that cause reaction.

MISPLACED EMPHASIS IN REVIVAL PREACHING

In our desperation to explain the difference between vibrant believers and the rest of the persons on the rolls of our churches, we have developed a view of revival which our forebears did not have. We have shifted our aim in revival to bolstering the spirituality of the "carnal Christian" instead of challenging such people with their lost state. We have tended to see revival as an extended "deeper-life conference," bringing persons in the church to a happy

and useful state; but our forbears said revival is principally the recovery and subsequent reigning of the gospel in all its converting power. To them revival preaching was not so much asking how Christians can be victorious in their lives, as it was asking, "How can you live like this and call yourself a Christian?" It was regeneration that made men whole, and substantively changed their character, not some additional experience. It is true that one repeatedly finds a type of terminology about the Spirit concerning the concept of unction in preaching, but this is vastly different than what is at the heart of the view of sanctification I am describing. Deeper-life theology, even with its important devotional aspects, has never been the purveyor of revival in the large-scale historic sense.[6]

Deeper-life theology (or semi-perfectionism—Christ living *perfectly* through me when certain truths are believed or commitments are in place) unwittingly works against revival whenever it permits a more or less long-standing "carnality" among believers. The belief that one can be a Christian and live outside of this "deeper-life" as a "carnal Christian" has blinded a major portion of the professed church. Revival preaching of former days, preaching which understood the revolutionary effects of regeneration, did not do this. The state of the church in earlier days demanded such straightforward preaching as a proper understanding of regeneration brings, and therefore Rowland, Whitefield, Edwards, Nettleton, etc., spoke "according to the times." The state of the church begs for such preaching again today.

WHO ARE THE UNREGENERATE CHURCH MEMBERS?

We must begin by describing one category of unregenerate church members as those who profess to know Christ, but simply do not come to the assembly at all, or who come only occasionally. If you believe I am too abrupt with this view, and think that coming to church is not

specifically given in Scripture as a mark of the Christian, consider what failure to attend indicates. It tells us that the professed believer does not love the brethren, need the preaching of the Word, relish the corporate worship of God, or acknowledge any submission to God-ordained leadership. In general, the one who does not come says that the environment of believers is not his preferred environment and he is more satisfied with the world.

In one denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, this problem has exceeded imagination. Out of the nearly sixteen million members only 30 percent attend church on a given Sunday morning.[7] This is my own denomination and the pangs of this truth have driven me to an all-out effort to say whatever can be said to turn this situation around. It is well-known that only one-third of those coming on Sunday morning (or ten percent of the total membership) love God enough and the family of God enough to come back for any other gathering of the church. They completely dispense with their sense of obligation by yawning through an hour on Sunday morning. It must be remembered that the churches down the road where, in many cases, the gospel is never preached at all, are able to get people out on Sunday mornings also.

This is an embarrassing admission for me to make to those of you who are not among the SBC, but maybe you can benefit from our dilemma, for I speak in many of your churches and know that you also have a similar problem. Our leading churches may have 2,000 in attendance, with 6,000 to 7,000 members, or some similar figures. And these adherents are the people that have been evangelized and brought into the church. What about those who were supposedly converted whom we were not able to get into our churches? The churches must take into account that the ratio is affected by unconverted children and guests who also attend, making the disparity even worse.

How different it was to speak in a church in Wales recently with nearly eight hundred in attendance, which was the actual membership of the church. In the States we would expect the membership to be two to three thousand!

Why we are not beside ourselves with grief over this kind of scenario eludes me. If there ever was a revival issue before us it is this one. There should be no satisfaction until more come to our churches than are on the rolls, a standard met and kept by our forbears and by many churches in other parts of the world. How different it was to speak in a church in Wales recently with nearly eight hundred in attendance, which was the actual membership of the church. In the States we would expect the membership to be two to three thousand!

One of the distressing tangents to this problem is that many who are promoting revival in our day, and are the most outspoken, are the very ones most responsible for this disparity between the actually converted and the number on the rolls. If revival will come, I fully suspect that many men who are considered the best of church leaders, who nonetheless are yielding the greatest numbers of unregenerate professors of faith, will need to repent of this carelessness or blatant disregard for souls. Should these men be our models? Why should we make into heroes those men who are most adept at producing deceived "converts"? Yet,

it seems to me that many of those promoting revival are oblivious to this problem and accept this disparity as normal. They have learned to work with these dismal percentages in order to produce growth. They are used to sealing 400 in deception to get 150 more in the church. I am not saying that there is malice here, or intentional manipulation. Often there are the finest of intentions. I am saying that there is a startling imperception of the problem. Next month they will have yet another campaign to bring people in, 70 percent (or more) of which will show all the evidences of being unconverted if even a cursory look at Scripture were taken.

It should be noted here that Jesus said that hirelings were called such because "they do not care for the sheep." When pastors and leaders have vast numbers of people in their church membership who do not attend church and whose names they do not even know, they are more interested in *success* (measured by numbers) than they are in *sheep*. That is the hireling mentality which is killing us.

Who are the unregenerate church members? They are not only those who do not come, but are those who do not *know* Christ, yet knowing Christ is the heart of eternal life (John 17:3; Heb. 8:11, etc.). They are those who have no fruit of holiness or consistently bear bad fruit (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 12:14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, etc.). They are those who are not repentant (Acts 17:30; John 2:23-25, etc.) and those who do not have persevering faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Peter 1:3-9, etc.). I have written elsewhere of these issues and will not belabor them now.[8] However, I will note this: Our churches are filled with people who do not have the basic evidences of conversion, yet sincerely believe they are right with God.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

"So what if the church rolls are filled with deceived people? At least there are some being saved. It is worth it to

get the few who are converted." If this is your rationale, please tell me when the church received a commission to be deceptive. The church has every obligation to the Light. It could never be permissible to let slide the massive blindness of the supposed converts we make. I am aware that we will have some deceived people, even with our best efforts. Paul had his Demas. However, is there any rationale adequate to excuse our problem?

The unconverted church member may well be the largest obstacle to evangelism in our day. He professes to know Christ, but by his deeds he denies Him (see Titus 1:16). Consider a community with thousands of professing church members running about, all sure they are believers because they have been told by someone in authority that they should never doubt their conversion if they "prayed the prayer." Couple these evangelical, professing believers with those who are attending Christian churches where the gospel has no platform. The unsaved man watches the actions of these professing Christians and sees that they are just like him. There is no difference. In some ways I cannot imagine why anyone would become a Christian in our day. To the onlooker, the Christian is just someone who goes to church occasionally and believes that there is something to the Bible, etc. Those people *we* know to be genuine Christians are to them like the most extreme radicals and even cultic in their devotion to Christ. They place them at the fringes of reality.

These deceived evangelicals are inoculated with Christianity and are doubly hard to win to Christ after their "experience." What if the scenario were different? What if "Christians" were true Christians, even though only a few in number? What potency their lives could have when placed against the backdrop of the world's views and living patterns! These are like those "who have upset the world" (Acts 17:6).

And what about the effects of the unconverted on sound church decision-making. There are varieties of views concerning decision-making in the local church; however, none of them exclude the place of at least the approbation of the body. There is no cooperation without participation to some extent. Why is it that churches so often make such foolish decisions? I contend it is because so many unconverted church members are part of the decision process.

Certainly the unregenerate among the churches demoralize the troops. We are going to battle with traitors in the ranks. We have to drag along the dead. This wearies believers and especially pastors. Doing the work of the church with large percentages of these unconverted members makes life difficult indeed. Which would you rather have—Gideon's first army, or Gideon's last (Judges 7)?

WHAT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS DILEMMA?

I ask you to consider eight contributing streams which have produced this swelling flood of deception in our day:

1) We have given a distorted and truncated law /gospel presentation. The typical evangelistic tract presentation includes one page on God's love for the sinner (interestingly, the motivation of God's love was never used in the evangelism of Acts); one page on sin; one page on the consequences of sin; one page on the cross; and one page telling the listener that he must invite Jesus into his heart (again, a phraseology never used in the Bible). Then, of course, a prayer not found in Scripture is used to seal the transaction. There will be no word on repentance, the first and last word of the New Testament. Rather, the sinner is told to simply "Admit that you are a sinner." There is often no concept of submission to the lordship of Christ. And there is no understanding of justification by faith alone. Conviction is missing because the demands of the law are

not articulated. Because almost anybody would want to go to heaven and have a friend like Jesus who will help him through all his problems, the decision to "pray the prayer" is often forthcoming. The end result is that we can get someone to "say" that he has "invited Jesus into his heart," but there is no change, no new creature, no grace, and therefore, no Christian at all.

Many give assurance in this manner: "You have invited Christ into your heart. Where is Christ right now? That's right. God cannot lie, and He said He would come in if you asked. You asked, and therefore Christ is in you. Don't ever doubt that. All doubts are of the Devil." In this way the sinner is taught to put more trust in his prayer than in Christ! We often go further than that by requiring that just the right words be said. ("I must not be a Christian because I did not pray to invite Jesus into my heart!")

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2) We have misapplied the doctrine of assurance. The habit of giving assurance to the person who professes to have closed with Christ is an assumption of a task which belongs to the Holy Spirit alone. Our job is to give the *basis*

upon which one can come to assurance that he or she is a true believer, not to give assurance outright. There is a vast difference between those two thoughts.

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Please stop this awful pattern. It locks people into deception. The issue of assurance is not about whether the person prayed the right words or was sincere when he prayed, but whether or not God has given him life! Is he a new creation? And is there fruit which corresponds to that life? When John wrote, "These things I have written to you who believe . . . that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13), we must ask, "What things?" The answer is the tests given in the whole of the epistle. Their assurance was to come from the evidence of a changed life. This, coupled with resting upon the objective work of Christ as articulated in Scripture, gives all the assurance the believer will ever need.

3) We have lacked caution in the area of childhood conversion. Children who claimed to be Christians at very young ages because they prayed the rightly-worded prayer, often become teenagers who have no real signs of life. I venture to say that a large majority of them end up that way. Think of all the decisions which were made in Vacation Bible School, or church camp, evangelistic church services, etc. Where are those people now? Some are true believers and have continued on. Most cannot be found anywhere near a church. Many of them you will find as the

rebellious teenagers who are made to come to the church, but who really have no life in them, acting just like the world except that they continue to go to church. They lean back in their seats and mock the preaching of the Word with their eyes if not their tongues. Are these genuine believers? When they go to college they will quit God altogether, because they really do not love the things of God. You might try to entertain them back, and that will work for some, but it is a false truce they make with God and will not last through death.

Though we all believe that children can and must come to Christ, we will do well to think through the wisdom of our forbears on this issue. Many of them believed in the potential of any child to know Christ, yet suspended their judgment on whether or not the child was actually converted until sometime later, even into their teen years. Why? Because it is the nature of children to be easily led and therefore easily deceived. They would hold off the child's public profession of faith until such time as he had demonstrated that he is choosing Christ above his peers, a fact which cannot be best known until the teen years. They would be told that knowing if a child is a true believer in Christ is often difficult to comprehend until mature issues are faced. The child would be told to continue to seek God in repentance and faith and to look for evidence of the changed life. You cannot "unsave" the child, but you can help him not to be deceived.

The above pattern may not be pleasing to you. So many childhood professors of faith fall away, however, that at least some more serious thinking should be engaged in before more children are locked in the deception of thinking they are converted when they are not.[9] It is quite interesting to note that there are no clear childhood conversions recorded in the book of Acts, a time of intense evangelism. Timothy, on the other hand, regularly heard the gospel

from his infancy (2 Tim. 3:14), but did not apparently "make the good confession" (baptism) until a young man (1 Tim. 6:12).[10]

4) We have promoted an incorrect view of sanctification. This has already been mentioned above; however, some additional thoughts must be added. To view sanctification as semi-perfectionists express it allows for a steady state of carnality in professing Christians. The impression that one can be a Christian and consistently live in rebellion to God as a "carnal Christian" plays a major role in our retention of the unsaved in our churches. The Scripture teaches in Hebrews 12:14: "Pursue . . . sanctification without which no one will see the Lord." Holiness, or sanctification, is *progressive* ("Pursue sanctification") and *essential* ("without which no one will see the Lord").

Paul's use of "carnal" in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 is a way of saying that those individuals are acting "like mere men," or, that they are acting just like unconverted people in the area of partiality to preachers. Otherwise, he commends them (1:4-9). His normal way of writing is to divide man into two states only (see Rom. 8; Gal. 5:19-25; Eph. 4:8, etc.). We have, in error, made the "carnal Christian life" a sort of permanent state. The doctrine implies that one can live like the world and still go to heaven, a teaching strictly forbidden in the Scriptures (see 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 6:7-8; Eph. 5:5-6; 1 John 3:4-9, etc.).

There are many forms of this two-tiered sanctification view, from the universalistic Quaker, Hanna Whitall Smith's *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life,* to the charismatic view of baptism of the Spirit and the Campus Crusade for Christ's *Spirit-Filled Life* booklet. This view of sanctification has its good effects, for it does teach an element of faith in the Spirit, and encourages a devotional outlook. However, it is not consistent with the progressive

view of sanctification (i.e., Heb. 12:14; Eph. 5:1-2; Rom. 12:1-2; Phil. 2:12-13; Rom. 8:13, etc.) found in Scripture. Its greatest danger is that of deception. If lost, under this doctrine, the "carnal Christian" is bound to always opt to remain as he is: a deceived, unregenerate man who believes himself to be a true believer merely living a sub-standard Christian life.

5) We have misconstrued the doctrine of security. By calling our doctrine "Once saved, always saved," we have lulled many damned souls into a state of deception. The phrase is absolutely true but comes across to the average person like this: "Once saved, you can live as unholy a life as you please and still go to heaven." That notion is untrue. We would do well to return to the better appellation for this truth from our forefathers: "The preservation and perseverance of the saints." Then we may say, "Once saved, always persevering." Our preservation by God is directly related to a living faith He puts within us. The kind of faith we are given is not human faith in the right object, but an entirely new species of faith as a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). This gift-of-God faith withstands the trials of life (1 Peter 1:3-9). It is therefore correct to say that the gospel is that "by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2). A "faith" that does not persevere is a faith that is not saving. It is merely a faith that is vain or empty of meaning, futile. It never was the right kind of faith at all. But our churches teach that a person may in fact not persevere and still go to heaven because he was sincere when he "prayed the prayer." Good doctrine would change these perceptions which have led many to hell.

6) We have reaped the dangers of invitationalism. The revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) believed that the new birth and revival were not miracles but were states accomplished by means of the proper use of the will. He

knew that to arrive at regeneration and, on a larger scale, revival, the will must be excited to action. Hence he developed the New Measures, one of which was the "anxious bench." In many ways, this anxious bench is the mother of our modern day invitationalism. There were a few possible uses of a public altar call prior to this, but Finney put the idea on the map in the early 1800s.

It is not my purpose to expose all the weaknesses of such a system, but only to say that when used evangelistically, it has the tendency to produce many false conversions. In earlier days, men such as Whitefield, Spurgeon, Rowlands, etc., found no use for it. They believed that there was greater value in the development of conviction. This does not mean that they had not preached the gospel; they most certainly had. They had invited them to come to the Savior. But they needed nothing to prop that up. They also held that when *God* brought true conviction, one could not keep that person away from Christ. This view places proper emphasis on the power of the Spirit and the Word. The message itself becomes the invitation, and no walking to the front of a building was called for. We invite people to come to *Christ*, not the "altar." The front of the sanctuary is not the only place in the church building where Christ can meet a repentant seeker. (In fact, a Christian church does not have an altar, in the Old Testament meaning of the word.)

It is true that Spurgeon, Nettleton, and others held "inquiry meetings" when needed, as a means to counsel those being dealt with by Christ. Today when we mention such a term we think of a meeting where exactly the same types of things take place in another room as happen at the front of a worship center. To us, in other words, it is a place to open the Bible and/or an evangelistic booklet and "lead them to Christ." But for these men it was a time to give pastoral counsel, to increase the convictions of the sinner, and

to guide him to the proper views of Christ, to pray *for* the penitent person, etc. It was not a meeting to get the people to repeat a prayer and to give them assurance that they were now Christians. This usage would have been foreign to these men. A person might come many times to an inquiry meeting, seeking help. Though the pastors would point them to Christ, they did not give some shallow formula to relieve their sorrows. It must be Christ who saved. The records show that many were converted in this manner. And there were dramatically fewer false conversions.[12]

The public evangelistic altar call has no precedent in Scripture. Though many have taken care of some of its dangers through wiser counsel at the front, a more complete look at this issue must be encouraged in evangelicalism today.

The public evangelistic altar call has no precedent in Scripture. Though many have taken care of some of its dangers through wiser counsel at the front, a more complete look at this issue must be encouraged in evangelicalism today. The apparent success of an altar full of people is not resulting in many changed lives. We must not die for a practice which is not supported by the Word and is, in demonstrable fact, reaping many prematurely.

7) We have refused to practice church discipline.

Jesus said that we should not go among the church and pull up the weeds or unregenerate church members before the time (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Those we think are weeds might be true believers because our judgment is often less than accurate. However, this does not prevent preaching and teaching on the issue (which all the New Testament writers did), nor does it prevent the forgotten practice which He strongly commands—church discipline.

The discipline of the church is one means God uses to help us restore true believers to vital Christianity and to remove those who are not among the saved. David committed the awful sin of adultery and murder. After perhaps nine months of agony (see Ps. 32, 52, etc.) David stares at the business end of the long prophetic finger of Nathan. What does he do? He crumbles in repentance. And why? Because he is a repenter at heart.

When Christ spoke of the discipline of the church (Matt. 18:15-17) He described the procedure to be used when personal offense occurred. First, He said, go by yourself to restore the offender, then take someone with you. But if these measures fail, bring it to the church. If the church cannot restore the individual church member, then you are to consider that member as a heathen and an IRS agent. What a strong statement to make against a fellow church member! How could it be assumed that this person who prayed "the sinner's prayer" just like you, and was baptized, and participated in the church, is really unregenerate? The answer lies in the fact that every real believer, like David, is a repenter at heart. If under the most severe rebuke of his church he will not repent, it is obvious that he is not a Christian at all. Authentic believers are not like that. At the end of the day, they will always repent.

The practice of church discipline was considered the third mark of the church by the Reformers, the others being the right administration of the ordinances and the preaching of the Word. What right does a church have calling itself a church if there is no accountability? In earlier days, failure to attend church was considered a disciplinary matter. Members of the church had no right to withhold their life, gifts, and fellowship from the other believers. They were bought with Christ's blood and had no rights over their own schedules, which were to be under the rule of Christ alone. Churches which wish to obey God on this issue will institute in their bylaws, if necessary, the exact procedure the church will take when members fail to attend, or come only occasionally, or sin in other persistent ways, and will make this clear to all incoming members. This is serious business, but if the church of God is not willing to obey its Head, then what can be said?

8) We have falsely blamed our lack of retention on poor follow-up when we should have looked much deeper. This blame-shifting has delayed our urgency in facing our problem. When a massive crusade takes place, it is common to report large numbers of converts; however, when one returns to the scene of this evangelistic fervor, not much change in the people can be found. I recently talked with missionaries who had the responsibility of regularly following up converts who had responded to invitations following an evangelistic film often shown around the world. Out of the hundreds in various places claimed as new converts, they could find only two who appeared to have any signs of Christian life. All the supposed converts were followed up exactly as they should have been. The reports of large numbers persisted, but the missionaries' hearts were broken, and their trust in an organization which reported such figures was shattered.

Should you have to fight your way into new converts' lives against their will in order to have Christian fellowship and to help grow them as new believers? After following up ten new "converts" immediately subsequent to the crusade

of a well-known evangelist, one pastor told me, "They not only did not want to talk with us; they *ran* from us!" Is this descriptive of the nature of new Christians?

I admit that the situation looks more than desperate. It appears that we have the ability to continue on mounting up huge statistics while the church decays inwardly. We can prop things up for a while. We can make people feel that our churches are the best things going. But to do so, we must keep them from looking more closely. What will this all come to?

I have had the privilege of speaking in many of the finest churches in the land. Some of them are quite large and have fully implemented plans for follow-up. I have yet to see any appreciable difference in their effectiveness in keeping "converts" with them. Some churches might entertain them for longer, but eventually they fall off. Why? Is it lack of follow-up? Usually not. Follow-up is important; however, true believers will always love the Word, long for fellowship, and follow spiritual leaders, because they are genuinely changed. It is God who has given them birth and they will make it, not because of any others, but because of the life that is in them. This is not said to diminish the need for follow-up, but to keep us from shifting the blame for our actions.

IS THERE HOPE?

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A great reformation is needed. Our doctrines must be examined. We don't even know how to preach the gospel. The gospel is not "Jesus died for our sins" with a new set of moving illustrations. It is Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. It is Jesus' parables and teachings. It is regeneration, justification, reconciliation, propitiation, and redemption (terms which most of our church members and even our leaders cannot adequately explain). It is grace alone through faith alone. It is truth carried into the hearts of people through impassioned preaching, teaching, and holy conversation, with the unction of the Holy Spirit.

And we need revival—an authentic visitation of God. Better yet, we need a reformational revival—Christ coming to change our doctrine, our worship, our evangelism. To have an exciting and enlarging of what we already have could only magnify our problems. We must have that which changes our thinking at the innermost core.

It has been my contention for some time that no revival will have any effect if it does not deal with the most pressing issue of our time in evangelicalism—the colossal disparity between profession and experience caused by our faulty doctrine and methodology. We look quite good on the surface, but we are so shallow within. It is hard to speak against apparent success. But if changes will come, there must be some men of virtue and courage to reform the churches. In days gone by, when the church had fallen to such a state, there were such men whom God raised up.

These were perceptive men who could call the church to practice her disciplinary mandate, to restore her doctrinal vitality, to recover the loftiness of the gospel, and to ignite a love for God exactly as He is—sovereign and mighty.

To fail to pray for the church of God is to sin against that church and to admit of no hope for revival. God has come in moments when hope was at its lowest. Perhaps we are not desperate enough. We are pragmatically secure and may have to wait for a deeper desperation. If you are among those most deeply sorrowing for the church, and most intent upon returning it to its former beauty, then I hope this article has further informed you of the direction of our need. Perhaps you could be used to rescue some who are deceived, even if wide-spread revival is delayed by God. It is really not enough just to pray; we must act out of this prayerful, trusting, disposition to do the will of God right now.

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Notes

1. Joseph Tracey, *The Great Awakening* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprint 1976), ix.
2. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939, 1988), 469.
3. J. C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprint 1978), 28.
4. Bob Roberts, International Awakening Ministries, from an unpublished paper.
5. John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*, as quoted from Prince (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, reprint 1981), xii.
6. Benjamin Warfield addresses the subject of the Oberlin Perfectionism of Charles Finney and how this led to the Keswick and other deeper life views in the excellent book, *Studies in Perfectionism* (Baker Book House). More study needs to be given to the relationship between views of sanctification and revival. The Asbury revival and the Canadian revival in our century did renew and encourage the Keswick view, but failed to produce the kind of lasting impact of the larger and earlier revivals. Those views have prevailed to our day somewhat because of the impetus they received from those revivals. In this author's view, regardless of the good which was done through the use of these theological views, the church has lost the ability to distinguish between those lost and saved due to this view of sanctification. The author also believes that had the old view of sanctification prevailed, many who had various experiences of the Keswick kind would have realized that they were being converted in their latter encounter with Christ. Because they were not able to articulate this in their testimony, for the most part, the impact on those around them needing authentic salvation was diminished.
7. These statistics are from the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, and are gathered yearly on a given typical Sunday in a large sampling of churches.
8. The publications, *Wasted Faith* and *The Unrepenting Repenter*, may be useful on this subject and can be ordered from Christian Communicators Worldwide, 5001 N. Oak Trafficway, Kansas City, Missouri 64118.
9. The publication, *Childhood Conversion*, may be ordered from Christian Communicators Worldwide at the above address. Also, a seven-part interview of the author by "Family Life Today" host Dennis Rainey may be purchased by calling 1-800-FLTODAY.
10. Timothy made "the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:12). This is most likely a reference to his baptism, apparently at a later date, since Paul, by implication, is included. This cannot be known for certain, but is generally accepted.
11. There is a chapter in *God Sent Revival* by John Thornbury (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press) on Nettleton's use of the inquiry room. A chapter is also devoted to Spurgeon's practice in this regard in the second volume of Spurgeon's autobiography, *Spurgeon, The Full Harvest* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust).