

Revival Must Be: A Word to Christians

By Theo M. Bamber

[Theo Bamber was one of the founders of the Baptist Revival Fellowship, which became Fellowship For Revival (FFR), and is now Reformation and Revival Fellowship (RRF). It seems fitting in this 70th Anniversary year to have a contribution from him. This article was originally published as Baptist Revival Fellowship Booklet No. 2.]

When we say that Revival Must Be, we do not intend to suggest that such a work of God can be engineered by human effort. Revival is ever the work of God. We mean that the need is desperate, and that unless revival comes to the church, hope must forever depart from the world!

A stranger to the truth of God may pick up this booklet, and therefore it is necessary to explain that revival can come to the church only. The world's need is not revival but resurrection. An unsaved man is dead in trespasses and sins. No man realises this important fact about himself until he sees that the words "life" and "death" refer to his relationship to God. The prodigal son was not dead to his friends upon whom he lavished his wealth. He was not dead to the pigs that ran after him for their food, but he was dead to his father and home. Of what use to be alive to wastrels and pigs, if one is dead to one's own father? Indeed the more alive the prodigal was to his friends in the far country; the more he was dead to his father and home. An unsaved man may be very much alive to the world and its pleasures and sins, and yet be dead while he lives because he is dead to God.

Dead to God! And that more truly than he realises, for the tragedy of his condition is terrible indeed.

It will repay you to look at the opening chapters of Genesis afresh with serious interest. When Adam sinned in the garden, he died, as God said he would. If he did not die then Satan told the truth! But Adam died. The spirit within him by which he had fellowship with God, the inner personality died. It ceased to be active; the faculty perished. Hence he sought to hide from the God whose fellowship had hitherto been so sweet and precious. When Adam and his wife had children they were born with the spirit dead to God. Adam and his wife could not produce children as they were before they sinned. That is what it means to be born in sin. Every descendant of Adam comes into the world with a spirit dead to God. The need of every individual therefore, is that his spirit should be brought to life. He needs resurrection! That cannot be achieved by any process of man any more than we can elevate mice to horses. God only can bring to life the spirit in you or me that is dead in sin. How is it done?

I first turn to Jesus who is in heaven, and acknowledge that I am a sinner, that I am dead in sin, and that I have committed sin. I tell Him that I believe He went to the Cross to die for me in the judgment of sin. I repent and abhor myself concerning my lost estate, and accept Him, as God has accepted Him, as my Sin-Bearer. When thus I trust Him, Jesus from heaven brings my dead spirit to life, and then baptizes me with the Holy Spirit. In the person of the Holy Spirit, I receive from the heavenly body of Jesus the life that is in His body in heaven. As I received my human life from the body of my father so I receive divine life from the body of Jesus, and in receiving that life, eternal life, I am saved. As the Lord Jesus from heaven seals me with the Holy Spirit He makes me a Christian, He saves me. I have been raised from the dead. From that instant I am in the true

invisible church of Jesus Christ. I have been born again. I have received life from Jesus, and now I want Him, I seek Him, I love Him, and Jesus is the joy and delight of my life.

If therefore, you have thus received eternal life from Jesus, and belong to the one and only church of those redeemed in the blood of Jesus, your privilege is to recognise that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, and that as a saved person you are to yield to the Holy Spirit, so that He may live through you the life of Jesus. Your Christian life is Christ living in you in the Person of the Holy Spirit. God intends and desires that ever increasingly you should be able to say "Not I, but Christ liveth in me." How glorious is such an experience! Day by day the Holy Spirit rules and reigns in the life, unveiling truth in Jesus from the Scriptures, revealing Jesus who lives in heaven, and seeking more and more liberty and power in the life and walk. Such a person is being continually revived. Revival is a daily experience.

Alas the unsuspecting Christian is beset with many trials in desiring such a life. For one reason he may not know what are his real possessions in Christ. I have known Christians who had no idea of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Some have thought themselves to be Christians who were not. They had quite sincerely decided to follow Jesus, but dead men cannot follow the living! They decided to take Him as their friend, but how can one who is an enemy to God become friend until reconciled? And how can we be reconciled save through His blood? Some have thought themselves Christians by joining a church, but you cannot join a church any more than you can join a family. You have to be born into it. Those in the true church of Jesus Christ have been born again, born from above, born anew of the Spirit, and by that birth they are in the church.

Even so some who really have put their trust in Jesus have not known that Jesus had given them the Holy Spirit. Hence, after conversion they still try to be followers of Jesus instead of trusting the Holy Spirit to live through them. Have you received the Holy Spirit? Have you ever thanked Jesus for this blessed gift of the Third Person in the Trinity? It will be like a second conversion for you when you praise Jesus, the heavenly Jesus, for this most precious blessing of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. That will indeed be the first step to revival.

Some who have thus made progress are still held back because one may grieve the Holy Spirit. How easy it is to falter before the attitude and actions of others, especially Christians. We grieve the Holy Spirit if we are unforgiving, unkind, ungracious and bitter with our tongue, and given to animosity. If we do not love our fellow-Christian whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen! And if these things are in our hearts, no matter what we profess, then the Spirit is grieved, and the life within, that ought to be dominant and triumphant, is feeble and faint.

The world too, so often exercises its influence. Think of this: "Love not the world." That is to say, never love the old life from which Christ has redeemed you. You have come out of darkness into light. The world's pleasures are a snare. They are a bait by which the Christian is drawn away from God, but always remember that if you go after the world's pleasures, you must be overwhelmed eventually in the world's pains and woes and despair. Nevertheless there are Christians who do not believe this, they seek to be as like to the world from which they have been redeemed as they can. Yet the Word declares: "Love not the world, if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And again: "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

Hence it comes about that the individual Christian, either through ignorance of the Holy Spirit, or

through neglect of grieving of the Spirit or love of the world, is not living as God intended he or she should live. They have the life of Jesus, but through their own folly and sin it is limited in them, enfeebled, grieved and perhaps quenched. Such a person needs revival. It is clear that Christians are needing this revival. Our churches were never intended to be as they are. They were intended to be centres of living fellowship where every member was in the full joy of the Holy Spirit, where sinners were brought under conviction crying out: "What must I do to be saved?" where multitudes were being added to the church. And instead.....? Ah! The bitter facts are too tragic, too heart-rending to record here.

How can revival come? It begins in those tremblings of the heart, of which you may be conscious. Memory is taking you back to your first joy in Christ and now you are constrained to measure the distance you have travelled from God, and it is farther than you thought. Is there pain of heart? Thank God for it! Do you feel as if you must pour out to God the bitter anguish of your soul as you ask Him to forgive you? Then do it! Do you mourn that love of the world, fear of man, ambition after earthly things, have hardened your heart? Then ask Him to give you again a heart of flesh to know Him. This is truly the work of the Spirit. Get alone with God, pour out your heart in unrestrained confession before Him, plead with Him to be gracious, to "restore the years [that] the locusts have eaten," and wait upon Him, sure that He has heard your prayer, and will most certainly answer in the conditions of His own creating. What will be those conditions?

First, you will be conscious of some measures of renewed interest in the Scriptures. However little or much, encourage it. Every minute you give to the Bible will create an appetite for another minute. Do not subject the Bible to your judgment, but accept it as "a lamp unto your feet." That is to say you will walk in its light and in its obedience. God will make clear to you two things. First the revelation of His will and purpose in the world, and secondly, His immediate will for you. The Indwelling Spirit is promised you for the purpose of leading you into all truth, and every step into that truth of the Spirit through the Word, will be a step towards revival blessing.

Secondly you will be led to a genuine concern that the perfect Will of God may be done in your life. The will may be there, but the accomplishment of God's Will in the life is often a painful experience, because we find our own human wills so frequently in conflict with God's will. In our blindness we misunderstand His light. Certainly if we really desire revival, we must be tested out as to whether we are spiritually capable of carrying it, and that demands some form of trial which so far from finding us humble under the hand of God, may reveal stubbornness, resentment and possibly indignation. God's perfect will is to be done in us so that in all situations we are found poised and controlled by the Spirit in the calmness of a faith that trusts Him.

If we are thinking and praying for revival, we must take the victory over the sins that do so easily beset us. And if this is difficult, as of course it is, let us know that the Spirit who reveals this fact to us will assuredly provide all the strength we need to take the victory. Patience with God in His will, and glad cooperation with Him in it, is an essential preparation for revival.

Thirdly, as thus the fire begins to burn in your own heart, you will realise that formal fellowship in a Christian church is not enough. Your soul will long for those who possess the same fire as you are conscious of. Search them out in your own church, because you owe a duty to the people to whom you immediately belong, and if you cannot find one, then ask the Lord most mercifully to deal with others as He has dealt with you. Why should He not? Has He not begun to revive you, not for you

but for others who are seeking God for His best. In this experience God will teach you how truly the Spirit within can be to you “a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

The Holy Spirit within will meet your every need, and you will be amazed how marvellously He does it. Then as you keep the eye of faith on the Lord in heaven, He will cause the Holy Spirit to flow out from you to others. You will not yourself perceive this ministry, but as you keep your faith in Him, believingly for this blessing, He will fulfil His promise. Your life will become an inspiration to others, the Spirit of Christ will be seen to be upon you. He will mature and transform the weaknesses that are human, and cause you to be a channel of Divine life to others, for as others come in touch with you, they will think of Christ.

These are the beginnings of grace as revealed in the Scriptures. These are the steps of faith we are to take, and as we take them we shall know the quickening of the Spirit within, we shall begin to feel our overwhelming need and our souls will be crying out for the Living God. We shall be conscious of the years that the locust has eaten, and shall want to retrieve them by His grace. We shall be intensely conscious of the sufferings of our Lord, and long that He may be satisfied. The longing will bear down upon us, not by human pressure, but by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We shall begin to long for souls, souls to enter into the blessing of the Holy Spirit, we shall begin to talk to our friends, to our loved ones; we shall be constrained to see that nothing matters so only men and women enter into all that Christ died to secure for them, and lives to bestow upon them.

Revival must begin with you! Let it begin in you! Your consent to the heavenly blessing is the first step. Prostrate your spirit before the Lord for fullness of life in the Holy Spirit, in yourself and in all other Christians. God never fails to answer that prayer. He will surely do it. Others will catch the fire; your church, whether you are the minister or a layman, will feel it. There will be new power in your services, Christians will be encouraged, backsliders brought back, sinners rescued from their sin. For when revival comes to the church, resurrection out of the dead will come to the world.

Theo M Bamber