

Revival and Evangelism

by C. William Fisher

Revival is the spiritual renewal of God's people, which is necessary for effective evangelism and the salvation of the unsaved and sanctification of believers.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:10, Joel 2:28, Acts 1:8, 2 Timothy 4:5

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Evangelism Outreach"

Description

C. William Fisher emphasizes the urgent need to redefine the terms 'revival' and 'evangelism' as they have been misused and confused in religious activities, leading to misunderstandings and disillusionment. Revival is described as the spiritual renewal experienced by the church, urging Christians to wake up and engage in God's work, while evangelism involves sharing the good news of the gospel with non-believers. The distinction between revival and evangelism is crucial, with revival being a new beginning of obedience to God and evangelism being the church's expression of its renewal through outreach and soul-winning efforts.

Transcript

The need to more carefully define what we mean by the words revival and evangelism was never more urgent than now. It has been observed that both words have become ecclesiastical ragbags into which we have crammed all sorts of religious activities until they have lost their shape and their distinctive meanings.

The words revival and evangelism have been used interchangeably by so many for so long that their real distinctions have become blurred. And out of this confusion have come misunderstandings, disillusionment, and a growing disenchantment that expresses itself in questions like, "Do revivals pay?" and, "What's wrong with our evangelism?"

While all the confusion and cynicism cannot be explained by semantic differences, yet a clear understanding of the meaning, objectives, limitations, and potentials of what these words symbolize would, in itself, go a long way towards clearing the atmosphere that is so heavy with criticism, questioning, uncertainty, and disillusionment concerning much of our evangelism today. For both words, on their way from Jerusalem to Jericho, have been beaten and robbed, and not only have the priests and the Levites gone by "on the other side"; they have often been the very ones wielding the clubs.

Even a brief glance at a dictionary would help one to see that revival means to reanimate, to renew, to awaken, to reinvigorate, to restore to new life that which is dying or dead. Evangelism, on the other hand,

means announcing, with the purpose of persuasion, the good news of the gospel.

Revival is what the church experiences. Evangelism is what the church engages in.

Revival is spiritual renewal of God's people. Evangelism is confronting those without with the claims of Christ.

Revival is God crying to lethargic Christians: "Wake up -- and get to work." Evangelism is an awakened church crying to sinners: "Repent -- and be saved."

Revival is getting one's own heart warmed. Evangelism is setting other hearts on fire.

Revival is periodic. Evangelism is continuous.

Those who understand the difference between revival and evangelism never say, "Oh, we didn't have much of a revival -- just a lot of church members warmed over!"

But that is revival.

Revival is experienced by the church; evangelism is what a revived church does about its renewal.

Those of insight and penetration have always distinguished between revival and evangelism. For instance, Dr. Paul Rees has said that "revival and evangelism, although closely linked, are not to be confounded. Revival is an experience in the church; evangelism is an expression of the church."

In an editorial in Christianity Today, April 9, 1965, under the title "What the Church Needs Most," were these words: "Revival and evangelism are not identical, although the word 'revival' is frequently used to designate soul-winning efforts directed toward unbelievers ... Revival will revitalize God's people ... But revival is not always welcome. For many its price is too high. There is no 'cheap grace' in revival. It entails repudiation of self-satisfied complacency, of easy preference of the good to the best, and of idols. Revival turns careless living into vital concern. It replaces conformity to the world with obedience to Jesus Christ. It exchanges self-indulgence for self-denial. Yet revival is not a miraculous visitation falling upon an unprepared people like a bolt out of the blue. It comes when God's people earnestly want revival and are willing to pay the price."

Over a hundred years ago Charles G. Finney said that "revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God." Fifty years ago Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes was saying that "by evangelism we mean any sustained effort to bring men and women to Christ." Twenty years ago J. D. Drysdale was saying that "revival is not a great ingathering of the lost, but a quickening of the saved." And ten years ago Arthur Wallis was saying, "Revival is necessary to counteract spiritual decline and to create spiritual momentum ... In revival the church dormant becomes the church militant." And about the same time, George Sweazey was saying in his book Effective Evangelism: "Evangelism is every possible way of reaching outside the Church to bring people to faith in Christ and membership in His Church"; while Lin D. Cartwright said in his book, Evangelism for Today, "The older members need constant remotivation. Herein is the chief value of the revival meeting."

James Burns, writing in 1909 in his book Revivals, Their Laws and Leaders, indicated what revival means in the church when he wrote: "To the church a revival means humiliation, a bitter knowledge of unworthiness, and an open and humiliating confession of sin on the part of her ministers and people. It is

not the easy and glowing thing many think it to be, who imagine that it

fills the pews, and reinstates the church in power and authority. It comes to scorch before it heals; it comes to condemn ministers and people for their unfaithful witness, for their selfish living, for their neglect of the cross, and to call them to daily renunciation, to an evangelical poverty, and to a deep and daily consecration.

"This is why," Burns continues, "a revival has ever been unpopular with large numbers within the church. Because it says nothing to them of power such as they have learned to love, or of ease, or of success; it accuses them of sin, it tells them that they are dead, it calls them to awake, to renounce the world, and to follow Christ."

It is Burns, also, who emphasized what he termed the "periodicity" of revivals, and how by their very nature they were limited in duration and how absurd it was to speak of "continuous revival." As modern a writer as Martin Marty says that "the very word revival carries with it a tone of the transitory." And D. E. Halteman distinguishes between revival and evangelism as follows: "Let us carefully distinguish between revival and the conversion of sinners. A revival belongs exclusively to the church. It is a season of intensified Christian activity in religion. The conversion of sinners is the result of this condition in the church."

But our own men have been saying the same things for a long time. Dr. Chapman, in an editorial in the Herald of Holiness of February 1, 1922, in discussing the difference between revival and evangelism, said that "a perpetual revival is a contradiction in terms. The church should always be engaged in evangelism, but a revival, by its very nature is periodic."

In an article in the Herald of Holiness of November 23, 1921, C. Warren Jones said: "When the church is thoroughly aroused and able to carry a burden, the revival will be completed in that sinners will be saved. In many places the most difficult thing to do is to awaken the church. The awakening must come first. Keep things in their proper order. Leading the world to Jesus Christ is the last thing and is the natural outgrowth of quickened believers and an awakened church."

"The first and greatest task of the evangelist," said C. W. Ruth in the Herald of July 30, 1924, "is to produce a revival atmosphere. Warnings and exhortations do but little to win the unsaved until the church is moved and warmed and ready."

"Our Master said that, 'when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will reprove the world,' and the context shows that He means when the Holy Spirit has come to the church sinners will be convicted of sin."

"There must be genuine heart burden," Ruth continues. "There must be unfeigned soul travail for lost men. There must be the breaking up and melting away of pride and indifference and self-sufficiency. There must be an outpouring of the Holy Spirit."

Dr. D. Shelby Corlett said in an editorial in the Herald of October 22, 1938: "A revival is the quickening of the Church into greater and more aggressive spiritual activities ... Indifferent and lukewarm Christians cannot bring a revival -- they need one ... We are becoming too formal, too

professional, too denominational, to precipitate much spiritual blessing upon the people of this generation. Only a genuine spiritual revival will meet the need."

And the present editor of the Herald of Holiness, Dr. W. T. Purkiser, said in an editorial in May 10, 1961: "Revival concerns Christians who have drifted out of contact with the battle for souls. Revival is the breath of God's Spirit fanning the glowing coals into white-hot flame. Revival is the awakening of deep concern for the lost and spiritually needy. Revival is the renewal of personal involvement in the spiritual aspects of God's work in the world.

"Evangelism," Dr. Purkiser concludes, "is the overflow of revival, and the salvation of the unsaved and sanctification of believers is its end result."

And more recently, Dr. Mendell Taylor, in his book *Exploring Evangelism*, says: "Revival is the Lord at work in the church; evangelism is the church at work for the Lord."

But farther back, and far more important than these human insights and distinctions, is the Word of God. That is the ultimate Authority for any list of priorities.

David gives the true sequence of revival and evangelism when he cries: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me ... Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

Notice that sequence: first, restoration and renewal -- that is revival; then outreach -- that is evangelism.

It is Jesus who gave the commands: "Tarry ye," and, "Go ye." "Tarry ye" -- that is revival. "Go ye" -- that is evangelism. And it must ever be in that sequence. Effective evangelism waits on revival. The disciples found it so on the Day of Pentecost, and Christians have found it so ever since. Without the tarrying, the going is ineffective and fruitless and frustrating. But when the heart is truly revived, renewed, and filled by His Spirit, effective evangelism is a natural and inevitable consequence. Most of the confusion surrounding our evangelism today is the result of our wanting evangelistic results without being willing to pay revival prices. Forgetting, or neglecting, the divine sequence: revival first, then evangelism, we too often engage in evangelism when we should have experienced revival.

The solution to the problems of evangelism in any day, in any church, and in any denomination is revival. A revived church never asks, "Do revival meetings pay?" -- it's too busy having them. A vigorously spiritual church never asks, "What's wrong with our evangelism?" -- it's too busy evangelizing.

It is Dr. Ralph Sockman who reminds us that "revival is not going down the street with a great big drum; revival is going back to Calvary with a great big sob."

But that's just it; we'd rather strut than sob.

Of course it's cheaper, and more fun, to strut. But after we have called attention to our beautiful new buildings and our increased finances and our rising respectability just so long, there begins to be an uneasiness, a certain gnawing sensation at the edges of our minds and hearts and we begin to ask, "Is this really why we've come to the Kingdom -- to compete with others on the basis of bigness and respectability? Is this really why we're here? Is this really what it's all about?" And a painful reevaluation begins. And this, I submit, is where we are.

I suggest that for myself, and for all of us, it's time we quit strutting and began sobbing.

If revival means renewal of right relationship with God and others, if it means a quickening of the Spirit in the hearts of Christians, if it means a new sensitivity to the needs of others -- then how absurd to ask: "Do revivals pay?" Of course they pay! They couldn't help but pay! And, I may ask, is there anything else that pays so much?

Do we say, because indifferent Nazarenes do not attend prayer meetings, that we should do away with prayer meetings? Do we say, because cold-hearted Nazarenes do not attend Sunday night services, that we should do away with Sunday night services? Do we say, because backslidden Nazarenes run off to the beaches or to the mountains or to the lakes instead of attending Sunday school on Sunday morning, that we should do away with Sunday school?

If we used the same yardstick on all religious activities that we sometimes use on our special meetings, we might stop altogether.

Many forms of evangelistic activity may not pay, but revivals always pay. They always have, from Old Testament times on, and they always will.

If these distinctions between revival and evangelism are valid, our slogans are not always true to the priorities. If by "Evangelism First" we mean priority of activity, then it is absolutely correct. If, however, it means priority of need, then the slogan should be "Revival First." For it is only revived, renewed, Spirit-filled hearts that can make any evangelism spiritually effective.

If evangelism, then, is not the cause but the result of a spiritual church, how true the title: IT'S REVIVAL WE NEED!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/c-william-fisher/revival-and-evangelism/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net