

Secret of Revival

by Erlo Stegen

Personal revival is hindered by unconfessed sin, but can be experienced by confessing sins and keeping a clean life.

Scripture: Isaiah 59:1

Topics: "Revival", "Confession of Sin"

Description

Erlo Stegen emphasizes that the secret of revival lies in recognizing and confessing our sins, as highlighted in Isaiah 59:1-3. He illustrates that personal revival is hindered by unconfessed sin, and true fruitfulness in our spiritual lives comes from a clean heart. Stegen shares stories of individuals who experienced revival after addressing their sins, underscoring the importance of repentance and the power of overcoming evil with good. He encourages believers to stop merely praying for revival and instead focus on personal holiness to see God work through them. The message calls for a deep introspection and a commitment to living a life that reflects God's grace and truth.

Transcript

Summary of sermon by Rev Erlo Stegen, 24 February 2013

Isaiah 59

1 Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear:

2 But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

3 For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

To many people the secret of revival is not understood and their lives remain unfruitful. Yet in this Scripture God opens this secret and tells us in plain language why there is a barrier to revival. It is not because of God being to blame. He has not lost His touch and is certainly not deaf to our prayers. The Lord says that He will not respond to our prayers if we harbour sin.

There was once a crusade in Berlin, Germany. It felt as though revival was so close but there was something which prevented the revival from breaking out. Somehow, the revival never came.

Just a few days after God began working in revival power at Maphumulo (at the beginning of 1967) we visited some brethren in different areas. We visited a farm of my brother near Dalton. It was hot so we gathered under the shade of a tree. As we were sharing from our Bibles I noticed a girl standing not far from us and looking at us. I pointed her out to the others and we called her to come closer and she joined us. I asked her if there was something she needed. She was totally illiterate, had never been to school. She then asked me if there was a book called Isaiah in the Bible, chapter 59, verses 1 and 2. When we confirmed that it was indeed in the Bible she smiled and asked us to read it to her and so I read to her this text. As I read her face lit up and she said, "preacher, now I know where my problem lies". She had turned to the Lord and after that people got converted through her, regularly. But for a while no one came to the Lord through her anymore and she was greatly troubled by it. She had prayed and asked God to show her what the reason was and then she dreamt that she should read Is 59:1 and 2. She immediately also knew what the sin was and she brought it to the light. As she got home people came to the Lord through her once again. She discovered the secret of personal revival.

This girl knew the answer to her spiritual poverty. Do you? Are people coming to the Lord through you? When was the last time you brought someone to the Lord Jesus? You might say you're too busy with work. But she too worked every day and in the evenings she led people to the Lord.

edwin-orr.jpg (3626 bytes) In the early 1950s, Dr Edwin Orr came often to preach in SA. He was a brilliant man of God. He had six doctorates at that time. He would write books while travelling by train. He was a specialist on revivals. He used to say that revival starts when people confess their sins and revival stops when people stop confessing their sins.

I have come to see practical truth of those words. People who have been used by the Lord while keeping their lives clean, stopped being fruitful as soon as they stopped to keep their lives clean. Personal revival stops through unconfessed sin.

Once my brother was troubled by his neighbour's goats who would eat his sugar-cane. He prayed for wisdom from God. He bought ropes, went to his neighbour and gave them to him saying he bought these for him so that his goats won't be so troublesome to him and to help his herdsman. He also offered to pay his herdsman for looking after the goats. The man was touched, saying that he was indeed a Christian. He conquered evil with good. Another farmer had the same problem with his neighbour's goats, but he got extremely angry, caught all the goats and impounded them so that the guilty part would have to pay for them to be released. The local people were extremely angry and threatened to burn down his farm. He then heard of my brother's solution, went and paid for the goats to be released and gave them back. He learnt the lesson how to conquer evil.

This world is full of evil and if you repay evil with evil you are only making matters worse.

A Chinese Christian had the problem that his neighbour would steal his water to water his own garden. They had very little water in the area. One day the Christian got up very early, watered his neighbour's garden first and when his neighbour awoke and wanted to water his garden he saw that it had been watered already. He realised it was his neighbour, the Christian. He was touched and never stole his water again. He overcame evil with good as Jesus taught us.

Stop praying for revival and repent of your personal sin, then your life will be fruitful. The subject of confession of sin is confusing to some. They feel that the Bible does not suffice regarding confession. Well, for those, hear these men of God - Bonhoeffer, Calvin and Luther (amongst many others).

bonhoeffer.jpg (8199 bytes) "Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution...Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*

john-calvin.jpg (7186 bytes) In John Calvin's, "The Form of Church Prayers" we also see the use of an absolution after the confession. Quoting from Calvin's Institutes Book 3 Chapter 4 Sections 12 and following we see some of Calvin's thinking relevant to the absolution. "The power of the keys has place in the three following modes of confession, -either when the whole Church , in a formal acknowledgment of its defects, supplicates pardon; or when a private individual; who has given public offence by some notable delinquency, testifies his repentance; or when he who from disquiet of conscience needs the aid of his minister, acquaints him with his infirmity.....For when the whole Church stands as it were at the bar of God, confesses her guilt, and finds her only refuge in the divine mercy, it is no common or light solace to have an ambassador of Christ present, invested with the mandate of reconciliation, by whom she may hear her absolution pronounced. Here the utility of the keys is justly commended when that embassy is duly discharged with becoming order and reverence. In like manner, when he who has as it were become an alien from the Church receives pardon, and is thus restored to brotherly unity, how great is the benefit of understanding that he is pardoned by those to whom Christ said, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John xx.23) ."

martin-luther.jpg (6232 bytes) Martin Luther was clear on this subject in saying that though others may not see the need for it he knew that he needed to whisper his sins into ear of a brother.

dlmoody.jpg (3880 bytes) DL Moody used to say: "Sin will keep you from this book (the Bible), or this book will keep you from sin." "The Word of God is living and active ... it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the hearts". (Heb 4:12).

If there is a blockage in your life. There is no personal revival despite all your prayers. Why not take God's Word seriously when He speaks in Is 59: 1-3?

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