

# Corporate Hindrances to Revival

by G. Richard Blackaby

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*Churches hinder revival by allowing unbiblical theology and secular practices to dull members to God's voice.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Psalm 51:17, Proverbs 28:13, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 4:17, Matthew 5:23, John 14:15, James 4:8, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 3:19

**Topics:** "Church Revival", "Spiritual Awakening"

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## Description

G. Richard Blackaby preaches on the hindrances to revival in churches, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and addressing corporate obstacles that impede the work of God. He highlights how misleading terminology, misdirected appeals, mistaken compassion, misplaced priorities, misunderstood terms, misdiagnosis, and misguided relationships can hinder a church's ability to experience true revival and spiritual awakening.

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## Transcript

Today's churches are praying for revival in unprecedented numbers. They are holding "revival meetings" and "renewal conferences" in the hope that these will hasten the coming of God's Spirit in power. Yet, despite these sincere efforts, many churches have allowed unbiblical theology, as well as secular practices, to become entrenched into their corporate lives. Thus, they impede the very work of God for which they are praying. Many practices have been accepted uncritically into the churches and are dulling members, rather than sensitizing them, to God's voice. The following are some corporate hindrances to revival.

**Misleading Terminology.** A movement of God among His people is characterized by a profound awareness of sin. Repentance of sin and revival are inseparable.

In many churches, however, sinful practices are being renamed and reclassified. Adultery is a sin that is clearly identified and condemned in Scripture. Yet when a church member commits adultery, it is often said euphemistically that he or she "fell into an affair." The sinner may be portrayed as the victim of an overwhelming schedule, or an unsympathetic spouse. Terminology, such as "falling into" and "affair" subtly shifts the blame away from the sinner. Rather than hiding behind less offensive terms, Christians must be encouraged to confess their sins and accept responsibility for them.

Another adjustment in terminology is to reclassify sin as a "weakness," "bad habit," or an "addiction." Rather than committing the sin of lust, the sinner is said to have an "addiction" to pornography. However

addictive and enslaving habitual sin can become, its roots still lie in sin. Society commiserates with an addict; God judges sin. An addict engenders sympathy for his or her condition, whereas the Christian community knows that sin is not to be tolerated. Society encourages addicts to seek therapy, but not necessarily to repent of sin.

By allowing worldly definitions for sin to creep into the church's vocabulary, churches inadvertently desensitize their people to the heinous reality of sin in their midst and the crucial need for repentance. If churches do not clearly identify sin for what it is, their people cannot properly respond to their condition.

Misdirected Appeals. Churches can also unwittingly challenge people in an unbiblical manner. Churches often extend altar calls wherein people who have not been walking in obedient fellowship with God are invited to "rededicate" their lives to God and to His will. In this process, people may come before the church and acknowledge that they have disobeyed God's will. They will affirm their desire to dedicate themselves afresh to obey God. Often, members of the congregation will be invited to come and encourage the one who has expressed his intent to try harder to obey God.

The problem with this is that it is not biblical. The crux of the gospel message is not a call to rededication, but a call to repentance. John the Baptist preached repentance (Matt. 3:2). Jesus preached repentance, both in His earthly ministry and as the resurrected Lord (Matt. 4:17; Rev. 3:19). If one's previous commitment did not keep him walking in obedience, a re-commitment is no more likely to make him faithful. The proper response to disobedience is not a commitment to try harder, but brokenness and repentance for rejecting the will of Almighty God. God looks for surrender to His will, not commitment to carry it out. Rather than asking church members to repeatedly promise to try harder, churches must call their people to repent before Holy God.

Mistaken Compassion. Many church members are uncomfortable with spiritual brokenness and repentance. When the Holy Spirit works in peoples' lives, convicting them of their sin, churches often do not know how to respond. We are uncomfortable with the tears and anguish of a sinner under conviction by the Spirit. Rather than allowing people to respond to what God is telling them, we often seek to immediately intervene. We try to comfort one whom God is making uncomfortable!

Misplaced Priorities. The structure of a worship service can mitigate against the Spirit's working. Pressure to end the service "on time" can leave little opportunity for people to respond to what God has said to them. Bringing the service abruptly to a close in order to announce the upcoming potluck dinner or church council meeting, can utterly quench the work that God began in the service. If worshippers are quickly ushered out of the auditorium to make room for another service, they are left with little time to process the awesome Word they just received from their Lord. The reality of many larger churches with multiple services is that they must follow a demanding schedule. Live telecasts of services on radio or television can allow media concerns rather than spiritual concerns to be the driving force of the worship service. The danger is that a mighty moving of God in the church may not "fit in" to the printed order of service!

Misunderstood Terms. Many churches fail to properly understand revival terminology. The term "revival" is the returning of God's people to Him. This means their hearts are cleansed and sensitized to God.

Revival does not refer to bringing unregenerate people to salvation. Contemporary "revival" services most often embrace an evangelistic theme. If several people respond to God for salvation, the church concludes that it had a successful "revival." Of course, any time a person experiences salvation a church should rejoice. Revival, however, is for God's people. Preaching evangelistic messages will not

necessarily revive Christians who have become spiritually lethargic. Rather, spiritually deadened Christians will conclude that, since they are already converted, the revival meetings have no relevance for them.

The term "repentance" is also greatly misunderstood. It is often seen as a negative term in an age where everything is expected to appear positive. Yet repentance is one of the most positive words in the Christian vocabulary! It refers to turning from a destructive path and moving instead into God's abundant life.

Too often, churches spurn the terminology of repentance, preferring instead to speak of God's love and forgiveness. God's love and forgiveness, however, can only be fully experienced on the basis of the sinner's repentance. Churches that misuse these terms may hinder their people from experiencing true forgiveness and true revival.

Misdiagnosis. The temptation for churches is to deal with symptoms rather than causes. Instead of addressing the condition of people's hearts, churches attempt to change their behavior. If members are not attending particular programs or services, churches try to make these programs and services more appealing. If members are not sharing their faith with unbelievers, classes in evangelism are offered. If needs are going unmet in the church, ministerial staff is hired to meet these needs.

Yes, it is important that services and programs be carefully designed, but we must look past people's behavior to the heart condition behind it. Rather than focusing on symptoms, God's people must be challenged to examine their love for God. People who truly love God will willingly serve Him, excitedly tell others about Him, and long to worship Him (John 14:15).

Misguided Relationships. Matthew 5:23-24 indicates that Christians are obligated to be reconciled to anyone with whom they have a conflict. Yet in many churches this is not practiced. Church leaders are allowed to feud with one another and yet continue in ecclesiastical leadership. Entire churches refuse to forgive splinter groups, mission churches, or former pastors and yet they presume God will bless them.

Churches have a corporate responsibility to seek reconciliation, just as individuals have been commanded to do so. If the church as a whole refuses to forgive, its members will also find it excusable to harbor bitterness toward others. If a church will corporately repent of unforgiveness toward another church or toward another person, its members will be freed to be wholly reconciled with God in revival.

There are many subtle attitudes, practices, and theological presuppositions which can hinder a church from experiencing revival. If these are properly dealt with, a church will be in a position to experience the mighty moving of God.

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/g-richard-blackaby/corporate-hindrances-to-revival/>

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