

Marks of Revival

by J.I. Packer

Revival is a movement of God's presence, responsiveness to his Word, and repentance, leading to a revived church and evangelism in the world.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Revival Movements", "Holy Spirit"

Description

J.I. Packer preaches on the features of revival movements, highlighting five constant factors found in all biblical and post-biblical revivals. These factors include: awareness of God's presence, responsiveness to God's Word, sensitiveness to sin leading to deep repentance, liveness in community filled with the Holy Spirit's power, and fruitfulness in testimony through evangelism and ethical impact on society.

Transcript

The features of revival movements on the surface vary widely, perhaps as a result of different settings, yet indeed God appears to delight in variety. Nevertheless, at the level of deeper analysis, there are constant factors recognizable in all biblical and post-biblical revivals, whatever their historical, racial, and cultural settings. They number five, and are described below.

Awareness of God's presence. The first and fundamental feature in revival is the sense that God has drawn awesomely near in his holiness, mercy, and might. This is felt as the fulfilling of the prayer of Isaiah 64:1ff: "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence . . . to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence." God "comes," "visits," and "draws near" to his people, and makes his majesty known. The effect is the same as it was for Isaiah himself, when he "saw the Lord sitting on a throne" in the temple and heard the angels' song -- "Holy, holy, holy"-- and was forced to cry, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:1-5). It is with this searching, scorching manifestation of God's presence that revival begins, and by its continuance that revival is sustained.

Responsiveness to God's Word. The sense of God's presence imparts new authority to his truth. The message of Scripture which previously was making only a superficial impact, if that, now searches its hearers and readers to the depth of their being. The statement that "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12) is verified over and over again. God's message--the gospel call to repentance, faith, and holiness, to praise and prayer,

witness and worship--authenticates itself unambiguously to men's consciences, and there is no room for half measures in response.

Sensitiveness to Sin. Deep awareness of what things are sinful and how sinful we are is the third feature of revival that calls for notice. No upsurge of religious interest or excitement merits the name of revival if there is no profound sense of sin at its heart. God's coming, and the consequent impact of his word, makes Christians much more sensitive to sin than they previously were: consciences become tender and a profound humbling takes place. The perverseness, ugliness, uncleanness, and guilt of sin are seen and felt with new vividness. Under revival conditions consciences are so quickened that conviction of each person's own sinfulness becomes strong and terrible, inducing agonies of mind that are beyond imagining till they happen. The gospel of forgiveness through Christ's cross comes to be loved as never before, as people see their need of it so much more clearly.

But conviction of sin is a means, not an end; the Spirit of God convinces of sin in order to induce repentance, and one of the more striking features of revival movements is the depth of repentance into which both saints and sinners are led. Repentance, as we know, is basically not moaning and remorse, but turning and change. Peter's listeners on the day of Pentecost were "pierced to the heart," which literally means to inflict with a violent blow, a vivid image of an acutely painful experience. Shattered, the congregation cried out, "Brethren, what shall we do?" Peter showed them the way of faith, repentance, and discipleship through Jesus Christ, and three thousand of them took it (Acts 2:37-41). Revival always includes a profound awareness of one's own sinfulness, leading to deep repentance and heartfelt embrace of the glorified, loving, pardoning Christ.

Liveliness in Community. A revived church is full of the life, joy and power of the Holy Spirit. With the Spirit's coming, fellowship with Christ is brought right to the center of our worship and devotion; the glorified Christ is shown, known, loved, served, and exalted. Love and generosity, unity and joy, assurance and boldness, a spirit of praise and prayer, and a passion to reach out to win others are recurring marks of a people experiencing revival. So is divine power in their preachers, a power which has nothing to do with natural eloquence.

Fruitfulness in testimony. Revival always has an evangelistic and ethical overflow into the world. When God revives the church, the new life overflows from the church for the conversion of outsiders and renovation of society. Christians become fearless in witness and tireless in their Savior's service. They proclaim by word and deed the power of the new life, souls are won, and a community conscience informed by Christian values emerges. Also in revival times God acts quickly; his work accelerates. Truth spreads, and people are born again and grow in Christ, with amazing rapidity.

Such in outline is the constant pattern by which genuine movements of revival identify themselves. Christians in revival are accordingly found living in God's presence (*coram Deo*), attending to his word, feeling acute concern about sin and righteousness, rejoicing in the assurance of Christ's love and their own salvation, spontaneously constant in worship, and tirelessly active in witness and service, fueling these activities by praise and prayer. The question that presses is whether revival is actually displayed in the lives of Christian individuals and communities: whether this quality of Christian life is there or not.

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