

(Revival) Religious Stumbling Blocks - Part 1

by Michael L. Brown

Michael L. Brown discusses the inevitability of religious stumbling blocks during revivals and the importance of humility in recognizing God's imperfect yet powerful work.

Duration: 30:51

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Hebrews 12:28, James 4:6

Topics: "Religious Pride", "Spiritual Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the reasons why God is often left out of human religious structures and not welcomed in prestigious places. He emphasizes that when people think they have it all figured out, they tend to prioritize their own systems and say 'the show must go on.' The speaker also highlights the pain and effort involved in birthing something new, using the analogy of childbirth. Additionally, the speaker mentions the importance of recognizing that God works through imperfect vessels, which can lead to imperfect manifestations. The sermon emphasizes the need to understand and overcome religious stumbling blocks.

Transcript

Up to Acts the second chapter, Acts chapter 2. You know one of the most remarkable things that God did in the whole of the Bible was when, in Numbers the 16th chapter, when Korah and his followers murmured and complained against Moses. And Moses totally got out of the way, let God fight for him. The earth opened up its mouth and swallowed up these people.

One of the most pronounced, miraculous acts of God in the entire Scripture, that the people get mad at Moses. You've killed the Lord's people, killed limited people. It's a wild thing that God can do things supernaturally, overwhelmingly, and yet be subject to criticism for those very things.

Hard to understand. And yet whenever revival comes, there's always something that's going to come with it and it's called religious stumbling blocks. You're always going to see it.

I'm going to give you specific reasons why, but you're always going to see religious stumbling blocks. Something that was not expected in the package. Something that you did not make arrangements for or reckon for.

Something that runs contrary to your doctrine or your expectation or your personal desire. Something that's just there to cause you to stumble. There are reasons that these things are always going to happen.

But remember, even in the book of Acts, the second chapter, one of the greatest miracles in the history of God's dealing with the people on planet earth. In other words, it's a big thing, a large thing, a huge thing. Human beings filled with the Spirit.

Tongues of fire upon them. Speaking in other tongues as the Spirit enables them. And what happens? Some people hear the praises of God in their own language and others say they're drunk.

Others think it's a joke. They hear the noise. They hear the wind.

They hear the people. They're drunk. Something's funny here.

Something's wrong. Well, why does God bring revival with religious stumbling blocks? Why is it something people are going to say, this is God? Others are going to say it's the flesh. Others are going to say it's the devil.

Why is it? Well, there's one reason, which is just kind of a natural thing to understand. It's not so much why God does it. I'm going to get to that next.

But why does it happen? Well, God is working through imperfect vessels and imperfect vessels are going to produce imperfect manifestations. Some human beings so gripped by the reality of God that it has shaken them to their very boots, gets up in front of the body, grabs the microphone, screaming and yelling, tears pouring down their cheeks, shaking and sobbing. Well, it's emotionalism.

You can't even hear what they're saying. Well, it's not so much that God did that as much as when His Spirit came upon that individual and showed them His love and showed them how off they had been and they repented and got fully in the flow of His love. They were so overwhelmed and they so wanted to communicate that to those people that humanly speaking, that's the only way it was going to happen.

Unless God superseded human limitations, unless He went beyond it and just caused all of these imperfections in man to cease and someone could just get up and speak perfectly and this and that. I remember when the Spirit fell in our church November 21st of 82, that there was one fellow there just gripped by the Spirit. I remember he was sitting and looking at his hands, sitting just kind of cross-legged or on his knees, I forget, just looking at his hands.

They felt like they were on fire and as he touched people, they would feel the fire in his hands and he was just overwhelmed by the presence of the Spirit. And a couple days after that, we went to pray for somebody and by the time we were done praying, this couple had been filled with the Spirit and delivered. By the time we were done, he was so overwhelmed by the Spirit that he literally could not drive his little truck, mini truck, Jeep, whatever it was.

And I remember as we drove in the car, whatever the vehicle was, just driving and he was just breathing heavily and just kind of sighing and groaning in the Spirit. Finally, he had to pull over and he had to switch. He still had to shift because it was a strange shift and I couldn't figure out how to do it, but I had to drive.

I had to drive. While he sat there, I'm saying, man, this is heavy, this is the Spirit, this is intense. And I remember I called someone up and they said, well, you know, he's new to these things and when you get

used to them, when you get used to him, when he gets a little teaching, this won't happen anymore.

And I remember I was kind of explaining that and agreeing with that. And the next day, the next day, the Spirit so overwhelmed me that I had to do everything in my power just about to stand my feet. I'd run.

I was told afterwards I ran to the pulpit at the end of a service and spoke in tongues and interpreted tongues. I was shaking violently from head to toe. I would have had to do everything in my human power to hold it back.

The message so overwhelmed me that when it was done, I just ran off the pulpit, got my face in the corner somewhere and just lay there and shook and trembled before the Lord. When I next looked up, almost the whole fellowship was up there repenting and crying out to God. You know, look, God's dealing through human beings, dealing with human beings.

And there's some wonderful quotes that Barlowman puts together talking about imperfect manifestations and the imperfections of revival. And I want you to hear these first before we get into the why of religious stumbling blocks. In other words, why does God do it? This explains why there are imperfect manifestations, but that's really just the introduction to religious stumbling blocks.

Religious stumbling blocks is something different that God intentionally does. Some of these imperfect manifestations cause people to stumble. And people who have all these religious hang-ups and preconceived notions, they get all bent out of shape.

That's something else. But let me just give you some of these quotes. I'm going to read a little section here, but I want you to listen carefully.

He says, in terms of the present Pentecostal work and its beginning, the turn of the century, he said, the enemy did much counterfeiting. It went through about the same experiences that all revivals have. Its foes were both inside and out.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels. Every natural birth is surrounded by circumstances not entirely pleasant. God's perfect work is wrought in human imperfection.

We are creatures of the fall. Then why expect a perfect manifestation in this case? We are coming back to God. In other words, Paul didn't say to the Corinthians, you guys are in immorality, you guys are in division, you guys are messed up about the resurrection.

It can't possibly be gifts of the Spirit that are being manifest in your midst. He didn't say that. It was a genuine manifestation of God, but it was among earthly, fallen people that needed some help getting back on track with God.

You can go down to a church that doesn't have revival and find every type of sin and mess in it, but the moment revival comes, people expect everything to come perfectly. It's not going to be like that. It's never going to be like that.

People write it off because they see some flesh, but why don't you write the whole thing off because there's flesh? Why don't you write off the history of the body and say there's no such thing as a real church because of all the atrocities committed in Jesus' name? No, you say, no, no, no, that's just what man has done. What God has done is perfect. What God does is perfect, but it comes through imperfect vessels.

Don't be surprised if a real move of God is attended with imperfection, is attended with some extremes, is attended with some mistakes. It does not mean it's not a move of God. John Wesley writes of his time, almost as soon as I was gone, two or three began to take their imaginations for impressions from God.

Meantime, a flood of reproach came upon me from almost every quarter. Being on alarm that Satan sows tares among the wheat of Christ. It has ever been so, especially on any remarkable outpouring of the Spirit and ever will be until the devil is chained for a thousand years.

Till then, he will always ape and endeavor to counteract the work of the Spirit of Christ. Just because there's weeds and tares sown in among the wheat doesn't mean that we say the wheat isn't real. The wheat isn't God.

Well, there were people who felt that the disciples in the book of Acts made some mistakes, so the whole thing is wrong. Who could ever think of such a thing? And yet religious people have this high canon of criticism against any revival. If it doesn't come perfectly to meet every one of their criteria, they say it's not of God.

Well, that's never going to happen. It's going to come through imperfect people. A scholar of the Reformation said, a religious movement almost always exceeds a just moderation.

In order that human nature may take one step in advance, it's pioneers must take many. Listen, how many of you have been around natural births? I mean, you were awake and there to see it. If you're a woman, you were awake and there to see it.

If you're a man, you were there with your wife. Okay. Did the baby come out wearing like a little, if it was a girl, like a little pink suit with like a little bow either in the hair or taped to the head if there wasn't enough? No, the thing came out.

I mean, there was this incredible joy. Both of our kids were home births. I mean, being right there is incredible, absolute exhilarating joy.

But you also knew what to expect. I mean, the kid's going to come out, look a little grubby, look a little dirty, look a little bloody. That's the way they're born.

That's still your wonderful, sweet child. Why? Because we're in a fallen world and birth is one of the first things that got touched by it. So, when something's being birthed, it's got to explode out of the womb.

There's some pain. You know, they told Nancy, the midwife told Nancy, she didn't push hard enough. She broke a blood vessel in her eye the first time pushing.

She was told she didn't push hard enough. Well, it takes effort and energy to explode this new life into the world. That's how it's going to be.

You know, listen, there was a guy who is the, well he is, not was, he is the head maintenance man at Christ for the Nations in Long Island. He is a maintenanical genius. Whatever the word is, not mechanical, but a maintenance-ical genius.

I mean, the guy is absolutely phenomenal, gifted. With cars also, but with any type of appliance, whether it's a television, whether it's a dishwasher, whether it's a pipe leading, so heating everything. He's amazing.

And you would tell him, we got this problem in our house. And he, without coming to examine it, he would tell you what was going on and how to discover it in your own house and what to do to, you know. I told him one time, we got this leak in the bathroom and it's this and that.

Downstairs, he says, you know what it is? He says, they probably got them plastic pipes there. That's the way Richie would talk. They probably got them plastic pipes there.

He said, now you watch. He says, that's what's causing it. It's eaten away at the wall and thus and such, thus and such, thus and such.

Without seeing it. And I remember he came in. Now the wall was kind of eaten away and he just, with his bare hands, he just began to rip the wall down.

You know, he says, uh-huh, uh-huh. You see, Michael? See, I told you. Uh-huh.

See them? There's those pipes. And you know, exactly the way he described it. The whole thing.

Well, I didn't say, Richie, Richie, you're pulling the... No, no, no. The thing was wet. The thing needed to be taken down.

The guy who comes in and re-does it, he's got to be fine. But the first guy just rips it down. Well, revival tears down before it builds up.

All right? I mean, just the basic principle. Tears down before it builds up. Have you ever... When you go and they're gonna dynamite an area.

You know, they're gonna, they're gonna blow up a building and flatten the thing and rebuild it. Do the guys come there in like three-piece suits that day? Do you have women there in lovely dresses? Are they serving tea? Say, what are you crazy? I mean, these guys are grubby and dirty. They're gonna blow the thing up.

It's not gonna be pretty. It's gonna be destructive. And then someone's gonna come and rebuild something real nice on it.

You know, someone was talking to me once about a certain spirit and preaching a certain way and, and this and that. Well, that's fine if you're preaching to your family and friends and those that love you. But when you go into the lion's den, you have to act differently.

I'm sure the tone with which Yeshua spoke to his own disciples was very different than the tone with which he spoke to religious hypocritical leaders. Right? I mean, God had to tell Ezekiel and Jeremiah, look, you don't be afraid of the people. Tell Ezekiel, I'm gonna make your face stronger than theirs.

They're gonna stare at you, but you're gonna stare them down. Well, when things burst out, I mean, there's gonna be an explosion. If I said, everybody, there's a, like, nuclear thing over here is about to explode.

We'll all die. Let's just, let's, like, move outside just a little bit. I mean, it wouldn't even register.

But if all of a sudden, we just run, dive through the, you know, break through the walls, whatever. You'd get out there. Try to make a point.

Get something. Revival comes with that same type of intensity. And with all the teaching we could give, still when it comes, you won't be ready for it.

You won't be. Nobody was more prepared than the 120 when Shavuot began, the day of Pentecost. Nobody was more prepared.

They were hungry. They were seeking God. They've been continually in prayer.

They were of one heart. And yet, how did the Spirit come? Suddenly, with the sound of a rushing, violent wind. You can never be ready for a move of God.

You can never fully prepare for the coming of God. I was at a church. God had shown me the outpouring that was going to come.

May 10th of 82, He showed me the outpouring that was going to come, which ultimately came November 21st of that year. I'd shared it with the leaders. I remember the pastor sat us down and read to us from the history of revivals of the Southern Presbyterian Church of the United States.

About people getting down on their knees and barking like dogs. Whether demons were leaving them or they were just being humble, but they were changed and were godly members of the church for years after that. And reading all these things just to say, now be ready.

You never know what's going to happen. And God didn't do a fraction of things wild like that. And half the people, more than half, were scandalized and turned against the Spirit.

Listen, we're dealing with birth. We're dealing with human beings. And the fact is, if you're going to pioneer the thing, you're going to have to smash through, break through.

You don't intend to, but it comes with such a burst of energy. You don't cut a little hole in the wall for the tidal wave. The tidal wave takes the house and moves it.

Another writer says, remember with what accompaniments of extravagance and fanaticism, the doctrine of justification by faith was brought back under Luther. The wonder was, not that Luther had the courage to face Pope and Cardinals, but that he had the courage to endure the contempt which his own doctrines brought upon him, as espoused and paraded by fanatical advocates. Recall, too, the scandal and offense which attended the revival of heart piety under Wesley.

You want to hear a heavy quote? What we denounce as error may be the refraction of some great truth below the horizon. John Wesley himself once prayed after the revival had about died out for the time, Oh Lord, send us the old revival without the defects. But if this cannot be, send it with all its defects.

We must have the revival. Adam Clarke said, nature along with Satan will always mingle themselves as far as they can in the genuine work of the Spirit in order to discredit and destroy it. In great revivals of religion, it is almost impossible to prevent wildfire from getting in among the true fire.

Dr. Seiss says, never indeed has there been a sowing of God on earth, but it has been over sown by Satan or a growth for Christ, which the plantings of the wicked one did not mingle with and hinder. He who sets out to find a perfect church in which there are no unworthy elements and no disfigurations proposes to himself a hopeless task. What's the point? The point is, if you're going to sit back and criticize, you'll miss God.

The point is, if you're going to sit back and wait for something perfect to come, the great move of God will pass you by and you'll judge it and be justified in your judging it and stay there empty while God's people rejoice. So imperfect manifestations are going to come as long as God is using imperfect vessels. Then there's another reason though for religious stumbling blocks, and this is more of an intentional reason, and that's that God is going to do what he does with a humble beginning.

What God does in the earth begins humbly, and if you remember by chance where the Savior of the world was born, one more quote from Bartleman's book, a body must be prepared in repentance and humility for every outpouring of the Spirit. The preaching of the Reformation was begun by Martin Luther in a tumble-down building in the midst of the public square in Wittenberg. Among those thousands of cathedrals in Germany and parish churches with which the world is filled, there was not one at that time which God chose for the glorious preaching of eternal life.

That which man esteems is passed by again. The Spirit is born in a humble stable outside ecclesiastical establishments. You know the Azusa Street revival? Azusa Street was a form of barn that was converted for meeting.

Brother Seymour who conducted the meeting, so-called, he didn't really conduct them, but he was the recognized leader, would sit behind two boxes with his head inside the top box just so nobody could see him. You picture that with the thrones that we've erected for people? You know the leaders come and sit on their thrones, some of you have a little footstool. People come and wait on them.

We think that's normal. We think that's right. The royal pastor is an abomination, but we just think that's normal.

And here where God's moving, he's trying to stay out of the way. Bartleman says at times, you know, he'd come to meetings and he'd hide. He'd lay under the organ so people wouldn't see him, wouldn't look at him and just pray.

God's gonna do what he does with humble beginning. Why? Well, one reason is human religious structure often leaves God out and he's not welcome in the bigger places, in the nicer places, in the more prestigious places. We'll see why in a little while.

But the moment people think that they have got it and it's going to go according to their system, they say the seven last words of the church, we never did it like this before. The show must go on. I mean that's the most spirit quenching phrase in services.

The show must go on. We've got a special speaker. We've got announcements.

I mean the ladies' bake fair is next week. We've got to announce it. We can't let the service go without the offering.

Listen, are you serving God or man? Are you trusting God or man? It shakes things to the foundation. God a lot of times comes outside of these circles because that's the only place we'll be accepted. You may have heard the famous story about this guy.

He's a bum on the street. Christmas Eve, wants to get into a church service. We'll have to change it for messianic circles.

He was trying to visit a messianic congregation on the last day of Passover. Either one, Christmas Eve, last day of Passover, you can choose depending on your religious orientation. So anyhow, he's all in rags.

He comes to the door and they won't let him into the building. You know the story? They won't let him into the building. We can't have you in here.

You're not dressed appropriately. It's a very holy occasion. But I just want to come in and worship God.

Sorry. And they turn him out. Actually, we'll either make it Christmas Eve or Hanukkah Eve because it's cold out for the story to be good.

It's really cold out. So he sits down on a bench and he's just starting to cry and real upset. All of a sudden he looks and Jesus, or for the other story, Yeshua, is sitting next to him.

Jesus says to him, why are you crying? He says, I want to go into that service so bad. They won't let me in. He says, I've been trying to get in there for 20 years.

They won't let me in either. I'm convinced that in his fullness, Jesus would not be welcoming most of our assemblies in the United States. How do I know it? Because I know that there are things that God would like to say to most of our assemblies and people are not willing to hear them because it would throw the program.

They may have to take somebody off staff. When God challenged us at our church, the beginning of 1983, after the Spirit was quenched and quenched and quenched, and on March 27th of 83, God wrote Ichabod on the doors and said that the outpouring of the Spirit was over there and called many of us to move on. A couple weeks later, leaders, broken, contrite, came to my house.

They had been rebuked by the Lord. They were confessing their sin. They said, you're right.

What do we need to do? And I said, simple. I said, every ministry must cease. Every office worker must consider themselves unemployed.

Every leader must step down. You've got to fall on your faces and pray and not do anything till God speaks. And the leaders that were there said, amen, that's God, we're going to do it.

And they went back and the others said, no, we had to repent a little, but we're going on, we're going on, we're going on. They went on. Within six weeks, the church had suddenly fallen \$18,000 in debt.

Within that same six weeks, everybody, including the pastor, had stepped down from taking any salary. The only one that stayed on was the administrator and he ended up, I don't know, a year or so later dying anyway. I mean, it was a tragic thing, but to show how to go on.

God is not welcome to do his thing most of the time in most of our lives and most of our services. It may sound blunt, it may seem absolutely extreme statement, but the fact of the matter is, you look at the biblical lifestyle, you look at the biblical call, you look at the biblical results, and you say, I guess God's not free to do everything you'd like to do in all of us. So things happen in humble circumstances, many times with children or with those who are not prominent ministry.

Sometimes it is with those prominent, but many times it's with with unknown people, with unlikely candidates, because that person's willing to do what God wants them to do and they don't have a

reputation to lose. Another reason that God starts things in such humble ways is because of human pride and a false sense of exclusivity. In other words, we have it.

Our congregation, our group, our movement, our denomination, we have it all. All these others are kind of secondary. Well, God's not going to start there.

You think you've got it? He's going to start down the block at the one you're sure doesn't have it. No one man has the ark of God. People say, well, how do you feel about groups who oppose you and stand against you? Well, does the Spirit of God visit their meetings? Yeah.

Well, then I'll just pray for them and bless them. What else am I going to do if the Spirit of God hasn't withdrawn? Anyone who said, well, we've got our group, our one emphasis has the exclusive anointing of God, God's going to start down the street from you at some place, just a hole in the wall that nobody even knows. So that stumbles religious people.

The imperfect manifestations stumble religious people. The humble beginnings, not in the big cathedral somewhere. It could be in a big cathedral.

Not with the big famous preacher somewhere. It could be. But just somewhere, you know, outdoor meeting in a poverty stricken area with some guy who can't even pronounce the English language right preaching.

That's where God pours out a spirit. Hey, he's got to because he couldn't get into the other places. And if he did, they would have felt vindicated.

Maybe they were open to a spirit, but they would have just put their stamp on it, says it's ours, we have it, we control it. Once you try and box it in, forget it. That's it.

That's the end of revival. There's another dimension, though, about religious stumbling blocks, which is different than these first two. Different than imperfect manifestations, different than humble beginning.

And this is the overt acts of God that are intentionally produced by the Spirit to cause people to stumble. Things that God intentionally, willfully does to cause the flesh to stumble. Now, I'll make that clear in a minute, but let me give you some examples.

You have to understand that maybe most revivals that have been prayed for, when the beginning of the outpouring has come, they were rejected. Most of the time, the thing that people were pleading for, they didn't get. Because when it finally came, it stumbled them, or it was going to cost too much.

Or they couldn't put their name on it. What do I mean? Well, let me give you some examples of religious stumbling blocks. I'm sure there are plenty of places in the last hundred years or so that have prayed for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but when it came with tongues, which their denomination flatly said was of the devil, which all the theology utterly wrote off, when it came with tongues, it was rejected.

Or maybe falling under the power. This particular service, the mayor of the city and the governor of the state are attending, and all of a sudden, people start falling out all over the place during the preaching. I remember... Well, let me say this.

I'm not talking about things that people do intentionally. I'm talking about things that God does. Sometimes what people do intentionally, God can use as a religious stumbling block.

One man told me that he had a guest speaker with him, and this guy was kind of very, very mildly charismatic, so he just hoped that that particular day, this one person who did a little jig every service wouldn't do the jig, and to make sure he sat on the other side with his guest, and sure enough, that person did their jig on the other side right in front of his guest, and he just had to die to that pride and that fleshly reputation consciousness. Deliverance. Oh, not demons leave.

Someone starts convulsing on the floor and demons leaving them in the middle of a service. Oh, no, God, we didn't want that. Didn't you get the contract that we said send revival according to these predetermined conditions? That's what you really want, and here's how it's coming.

There's always something that you just didn't get when you read it, you know? You didn't see it. Read between the lines, it wasn't there. Well, it came with the package, and I'll tell you why in a minute.

One of the most interesting ones really, really took hold in the frontier revival under Peter Cartwright. That was called The Jerks, where some of us have seen maybe a similar manifestation with the convulsing shoulders and rapidly moving neck, but these severe jerks that would convulse people, and it was said that the people would be there, you know, the ladies with their bonnets and all done up nicely in their hair like in a ponytail, but wrapped around on top of their head, and they said the first jerk would be so severe it would loosen the ponytail, and the sound, according to Peter Cartwright, the sound of the hair hitting the back was as loud as a wagoner's whip. Can you pick that? They said, well, you know, why did it happen? Some people felt it was a real sign to the frontiersmen, you know, they wanted something genuine.

This was a real sign. Others felt it was just, again, to humble the religious crowd. Some of the things we'll look at in a minute.

Peter Cartwright says it would happen, he just starts to laugh. I mean, I've had that, and I've confessed this honestly. Sometimes the Spirit of God will fall upon people in such measure it seems so intense, it seems so wild.

Sometimes I'll turn around and it may look very holy and powerful. Wow, he's just commuting with God. I'm just trying to wipe the grin off my face.

Oh no, look at this. I remember I got asked to speak at this birthday party, one-year birthday party for a Korean baby, and this is a real big custom in the old country because not all babies made it to be a year. So they dressed the baby up like a clown.

There was this whole festive thing. I didn't know I preached the real hellfire message that night, but I mean, whatever. Everyone in the room I think I forced to get saved, one of those types of environments.

But afterwards I started laying hands on people. You know, that's what the couple wanted me to do, just minister for you. I started laying hands on people.

And here in the living room, I mean, some of them I don't even think they were saved, and they just started collapsing. You know, here just getting laid out, the power of God falling on this guy's living room in the midst of this birthday party. And I just remember turning around, Nancy sitting there.

I'm just trying to get, you know, get a grip on myself. It's just so funny to see it happen. Peter Cartwright said one time it was a really serious, solemn thing.

Again, picture this. These guys came in, drunken, rowdy, cursing, abusive, just gonna try and break up the meeting. And one of the guys, kind of like the gang leader, was really just going bananas.

And he got seized by the jerk. And the more he got seized, the more he cursed. And the more he went on.

And he was trying to walk away, and just his whole body convulsing. So he had some, you know, bottle of liquor. So he kept trying to drink it, but he couldn't get the bottle to his mouth, because he was convulsing so heavily.

And the more he convulsed, the more he cursed, the more he blasphemed. Finally, the bottle smashed. Because he said, you know, nothing to these jerks that I can't just drink off.

Finally, the bottle smashed. And he was surrounded by people, and he continued to blaspheme. So he got suddenly, totally seized, and broke his neck and died.

Just jerk, convulsed, and dropped dead. And Maria Woodworth at his meetings, because of all of the trances, they called her the trance evangelist, or the voodoo priestess. You know, she'd be preaching, and in the middle of her message, just freeze.

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