

Important Questions

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the importance of discernment and biblical alignment in understanding and experiencing true revival.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:2, Matthew 3:12, Romans 10:9, Colossians 3:2, Hebrews 12:27, Hebrews 13:11, 2 Peter 3:10-11, Revelation 8:7, Revelation 17:16

Topics: "Divine Judgment", "Holy Purification"

Description

The preacher delves into the meaning of 'burned up' (katakaio) in the Bible, emphasizing its significance in consuming or destroying by fire, symbolizing the ultimate purification and judgment by God. This burning up is seen in various contexts such as the destruction of chaff, tares, magic paraphernalia, and works done in self-glory. The sermon highlights the association of fire with holiness and judgment, pointing to the final purging of sin and ushering in a state of perfect holiness in the Day of God.

Transcript

When revival comes, it will be a fragile blessing, a blessing that will need to be handled with great care. Failure to rightly handle this blessing from God has often, in the past, kept revival from producing its highest and best possible results.

In a very lovely sense, the nature of revival is all eyes on God. If the attention turns to you or to me, to some phenomenon, to some over-emphasis upon a good truth--it matters not what eyes turn to--when eyes are off the Savior, the revival diminishes and soon ceases.

Thus, it is urgent that we prepare ourselves for revival by discerning, as best we can, the nature of true revival and avoiding, at all costs, those disruptive and hurtful factors that Satan is known to use in minimizing the good effects of the work of God in revival.

Following are some important questions to ask in the face of apparent revival.

Is there a biblical warrant for what is going on in the name of revival?

One could conceivably claim to find support somewhere in the Bible or church history for almost any kind of experience. But instead of searching for support for our experience, we should be asking, "Is there a biblical warrant for this? Is it taught in the Bible? Is it commanded or urged in the Bible?"

There is no danger that eyes will be turned away from the Savior when we stick with the things the Bible requires, but if we allow things that have no biblical warrant, we endanger the work of God.

The Scripture requires us to test things and to judge them righteously (I John 4:1; John 7:24). In other words, we must discern if a thing is right or wrong, good or bad, according to the standards laid out for us in Scripture. "He who is spiritual appraises all things" (I Cor. 2:15a).

Obviously, in order to successfully do this, we must have a thorough understanding of what the Bible does warrant. Therefore, in preparation for revival, we need to give ourselves to the discovery of the mind of God throughout Scripture so that we will be capable of testing things as they occur.

Is what is happening in harmony with the whole tone of Scripture?

In past (as well as present) movements that some have called revivals, people have roared like lions, barked like dogs, rolled in the aisles like circus clowns, and laughed as if God were an amusement. There have also been some offshoots of true revivals that have majored on such unusual activity.

But we need to ask ourselves, does the tone of Scripture suggest that it is in the mind and heart of God that His children conduct themselves in this fashion? You might find somewhere, either in Scripture or in history, a record of someone behaving like a beast or a lunatic, but who would suggest that the tone of Scripture is that we behave in such a manner?

When some strange spirit is moving among us or some strange fire is burning in our midst, we may let ourselves go and bark like dogs, but surely we must not credit such conduct to God.

Whenever there are signs of His manifest presence, be constantly asking concerning the effects, "Is this in keeping with the whole tone of the Word of God?"

Is the Bible prominently and faithfully preached and taught, taking on even greater prominence as the movement progresses?

The preaching of the Word of God is the primary tool God has given us for the salvation of the lost and for the growth and development of the people of God in the ways of Christ. Every movement that is lacking in solid biblical preaching is to be held in suspicion. Every event that overshadows the bold preaching of the great doctrines of the faith is immediately questionable.

In all the history of the church, there is no more needed or wonderful time for preaching than in a time of revival. Failure here is of the greatest possible consequence.

Is what is happening Godlike?

Is it really in keeping with what God has revealed about Himself? What is the most prominent effect of revival? Obviously, holiness! In a genuine revival, an awesome sense of conviction of sin settles upon people to the point where they cry out in some fashion, "Woe is me! I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, of an impure heart!"

There is a depth of repentance in revival which does not occur in normal times, and that depth of repentance results in glorious new holiness. Now that is Godlike! But is laughing when the crucifixion of Christ is described Godlike? Is rolling in the aisle Godlike? Is being taken with the jerks Godlike? Is falling on the floor and foaming at the mouth Godlike? If those things are Godlike, what god are we talking

about? Certainly, it is not the God of the Bible!

Does whatever is happening draw attention to Christ?

We understand that the nature of revivals is such that emotions are stirred at very deep levels. But people whose emotions are stirred can be subject to foolish conduct as well as godly conduct.

In the early days of the eighteenth century revival in England, there were women who were falling into fainted or trances. George Whitefield announced that any woman thus affected would be carried out of the meeting. Do you know what happened? The women ceased the practice.

If the object of people's attention becomes the phenomena, you know it isn't of God because that which is of God always draws attention to Christ. He becomes the subject of conversation. He becomes the center of focus.

Is there anything about this occurrence that advances the kingdom of darkness?

Is it a mixed blessing? Does it strengthen one portion of the flock of God while destroying another? Can the forces of evil secretly rejoice in anything that is occurring, while, at the same time, the lovers of righteousness are blessing God in the name of revival? God's blessings are not mixed. You will never find God sending anything that is somewhat good and somewhat evil.

Many events that seemed to produce some good have grievously divided churches. Obviously, a church that is made up of believers and unbelievers will probably divide over revival, but what is to be said about a work that divides true brother from true brother? Christ's heart calls for His people to be one (John 17). Jude makes it clear that those that cause division are devoid of the Spirit (vs. 19). Therefore, we can be sure that a divisive movement is not of God, but rather an occasion for the devil to celebrate.

Is repentance among believers one of the leading characteristics?

How could any experience be called true revival if it does not produce conviction of sin leading to genuine repentance? God has made it clear that His will for His people is their sanctification (I Thess. 4:3) and has warned us that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

If there is only joy or rapturous feelings and no repentance, is the experience a recovery of the holiness God expects? Can a forward step of obedience be taken which is not first founded on an utter rejection and hatred of the sin being replaced? Repentance has been a key mark of every true revival. God is not likely to reward unrepentant people with increased blessing.

Does it need to be worked up by human action or emotions, or is it prompted by God's Spirit?

A congregation can be told to stand and stomp their feet, or can be given suggestive hints of a desired or expected response "to the Spirit," and all their actions be void of God's prompting. God uses men to preach the gospel, to call sinners to repentance, and to exhort them to holiness; but the power and conviction and conversions that occur are from God. Those things that God Himself does are not produced by human coercion or suggestion.

Is what is happening subject to human control?

Earlier we referred to the meetings in Whitefield's day when he forbade swoons or faints and they ceased. When a leader can say, "Stop all the noise and nonsense," and it stops, it is evident that its origin is of man and not of God.

Saintly Andrew Murray tried to take control of the work of the Holy Spirit in his church in South Africa but quickly discovered that the work of God is greater than even the most loved and respected of pastors.

A phenomenon, an occurrence, an event that is subject to ordering and can be told to cease is not of God. This is not to say that godly men cannot lead under the Spirit's direction but that the substance of what is occurring in true revival is not humanly controllable. This is God at work!

Repentance will continue, brokenness will increase, the spirit of prayer will go on mounting up, exaltation of God will surge forward if God is visiting His people--no matter what instructions are given. When God is in the midst of His people, He is in charge.

Does what is happening produce an elitist mind set of the "haves" and the "have-nots"?

When something occurs in the realm of religion that causes some to think they have "it" and others do not, beware. Spiritual pride is very dangerous, and it is never of God.

A study of the Welsh Revival of 1904-05 clearly demonstrates that one of its weaknesses was this "haves/have-nots" mentality. Some of those who thought of themselves as "the children of revival" grew suspicious of other Welsh believers who came to Christ in non-revival circumstances. Part of the decline that followed 1905 was due to the tendency to think of subjects of the revival as superior to others.

Is what is happening something that unbelievers, cults, false religions, and other non-Christians have experienced or practiced?

While it may be troubling to some, it is nevertheless true that even such manifestations as miracles of healing, gifts of tongues, and resurrections from the dead are reported by cults like Mormons and others. This doesn't automatically prove these things are not of God, but it ought to lessen any blind enthusiasm for such phenomena when we realize they are not exclusively Christian. If unbelievers have or are experiencing such things, a flag of suspicion should be raised in our minds over what is going on.

In contrast, is being brought to a deep and a permanent level of genuine repentance and faith something that unbelievers experience? No, indeed! Is falling in love with Christ and embracing everything that God desires us to be something that takes place in cults?

There are certain things that are obviously and distinctly of God--absolutely and exclusively Christian. We ought to focus on them instead of on things in which unbelievers can and do participate.

Can unbelievers participate in this with no permanent alteration in their spiritual condition?

Every revival carries in its wake some deceived people who experience excitement without real change. But, in the main, the nature of true revival is such that the counterfeit is discovered and rejected.

One can experience exhilaration in the midst of a religious uproar and live like the devil thereafter. He can be taken with intense religious fervor, practicing it incessantly for weeks, and return to a wicked lifestyle. But you cannot repent and believe and remain un-changed, and repenting and believing are what true revival is about.

So ask the question, "On the whole, are unbelievers able to participate continuously in this event with no permanent spiritual alteration?" If they are, this so-called revival is not of God.

Does what is happening generate confusion in the local assembly of the children of God and abroad?

I am not asking if the world is confused. On the day of Pentecost, unbelievers came rushing, asking if God's children had gone mad or if they were drunk. The question is, are the saints, the children of God, the lovers of Jesus, confused by what is going on?

The Holy Spirit is not the author of confusion. When the true church is in continual confusion in the midst of a spiritual activity, it is not of God. When the Holy Spirit bows God's people down in brokenness and contrition over sin, it does not confuse them.

Are the leaders godly men and are they in subjection to other godly men, or are they a law unto themselves?

The Bible tells us, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." Godly men know the great wisdom and the urgent necessity of being open to other godly leaders. In times of revival, this general need of counsel is even greater than normal.

If you are in a movement where the leaders are not seeking the counsel and guidance of godly men outside their own fellowship, beware.

A great tragedy happened during the 1904-05 Welsh revival. Evan Roberts, a primary leader, was young and, in certain critical ways, unwise. The older, wiser, godly men of the principality should have gathered around him as counselors. They should have urged him to commit himself to them in accountability, and in doing so, they could have protected both Evan Roberts and the work of God in the revival. Instead, the prevailing slogan seemed to be, "Touch not the Lord's anointed."

In consequence, Evan's conduct became increasingly erratic, and before long, he was removed from the revival, apparently suffering some form of severe breakdown. The revival itself was relatively short-lived, and much that needed to happen failed.

If ever a leader needs others to hold him accountable, it is when the spirit of revival descends. If those in leadership resist counsel and refuse to be held accountable for their teaching and actions, there is reason to question the validity of their ministry.

Does what is happening focus on the physical and temporal or on the spiritual and eternal?

My soul longs for that which fills it with greater love toward the Savior. A revival that brings holiness is what I crave; and I assume, rightly I hope, that you crave it also.

But I cannot get excited about any religious happening that merely affects people physically, that is focused on time and not eternity, on the body but not the spirit. The news that I live to hear is not that everybody is dancing or leaping or shouting, but that they have repented of all sin and are worshiping obediently at Christ's feet.

Does what is happening demonstrate a true inward change of affections?

The very essence of sin is self. It is me versus God and me versus you. If that which we are calling revival is genuine, if it is truly of God, it is going to produce an inward change of affections which enables one to cease loving himself and to begin gloriously loving God and others. The change it produces in affections will not be temporary but permanent. Be wary of any religious event that does not produce this permanent change of affections.

Do the oldest and most experienced and godly men in the kingdom of Christ sanction it?

When revivals occur, there is usually some opposition, but it doesn't come from the oldest, most godly, experienced men in the kingdom. Opposition normally stems from those whose own kingdoms are shaken by the true work of God. When the arrogant in heart see their own ministries disrupted, they fight against revival because they really care nothing about God's work.

Consider a common occurrence in revivals. The younger men get out of hand and begin to move toward excesses. They may even say to old men, "You sit in the corner and be still. The people are tired of listening to you and want to hear from some of us who have the fire. We are going to run things now." We should entertain doubt about anything from which the godly, experienced, older men are ejected.

From the historical standpoint, the prospect of an old man leading the coming revival is ever so slight. (That statement, of course, does not take into account the sovereignty of God who does whatever He pleases.) But there are very few instances on record when a great work of God had an old man as its initial leader. When revival comes, the probability is that it will be led by younger men--but younger men who value the counsel and the guidance of their elders.

I trust it is apparent to you, in surveying these questions, that the discernment which the Holy Spirit alone can give is ever so urgent in these matters. Seek it with all your heart. Seek it continually. And may God, in His mighty grace, allow us a revival that permeates and deepens until the whole world knows that Jesus Christ is God.

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