

A Closer Look at

*R*evival
and
Revival Meetings

By Gil Rugh

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FAX: (402) 483-6716

Phone: (402) 483-4541

A Closer Look at Revival and Revival Meetings

Revival and revival meetings have been an important part of American Christianity for the last two-hundred and fifty years. The roots of revival in America can be traced to The Great Awakening of the mid 1700s; the Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s; and to such men as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and Charles Finney. Revival meetings, however, are not just a thing of the past. Even today, they are held throughout the country and around the world. Yet, though some have written about revival and revival meetings, not much has been put forth concerning the biblical basis for revival or whether what takes place at revival meetings is consistent with Scripture. Also, very few works have addressed the issues of revival and revival meetings from a dispensational viewpoint that interprets Scripture from a normal, literal approach and holds the biblical distinction between Israel and the church. Such an approach will be used in this book.

By way of introduction, I would like to share some historical background behind my study of this issue. In 1992, the church I pastor was asked to participate with other area evangelical churches in a series of revival meetings to be held in our home city of Lincoln, Nebraska. To help decide whether we should participate or not, I decided to research the issues of revival and revival meetings. In particular, I read from the writings of revivalists to see what their basis for revival was. When the matter had been looked into, we decided it would be best not to participate in the revival meetings because of what we believed to be legitimate and serious theological reasons. Our refusal to participate in the revival meetings was

not accepted well by some Christians in our community. Some took our actions to mean that we were against winning the lost for Christ or that we were not interested in helping believers who were struggling spiritually. Others believed we were only interested in criticizing other churches who did not interpret the Bible exactly the way we do. Unfortunately, the issues became personal instead of biblical and theological. Yet as Christians we are told to “examine everything carefully” (1 Thess. 5:21). This certainly would involve the biblical validity of revival meetings and whether we should be involved with them.

As I read several books by those who support revival meetings, I was impressed by their devotion to the Lord and their desire to see others live their lives totally committed to Christ. Moreover, no doubt exists that many people have been saved and have grown in their Christian walks after attending revival meetings. Yet following the mandate of Scripture to “examine everything carefully,” we must look at the methods involved with revival meetings, as well as the theology of those promoting them.

Before we begin, though, it must not be assumed that having concerns about today’s revival meetings means we are against the Lord working in the hearts and lives of people. Concern about today’s revival meetings does not mean we are unconcerned about the lost or against evangelism. We affirm that all churches should be strongly burdened to reach their neighbors, city, nation, and world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We also realize that there are struggling Christians who need help and the church should do all it can to help them. Finally, concern about today’s revival meetings does not mean we are against praying for the Lord to move in the hearts and lives of those in our cities. If the Lord, in His sovereignty saves large numbers of people in a short period of time we would rejoice in that. With these clarifications in mind, let us look at the issues involved with revival and revival meetings.

What Is Revival?

We hear a lot about revival in the church today. We are told that our churches, cities, nation, and world need it. Yet, what is revival? Is revival the evangelization of the lost; or is it spiritual renewal for people who are already saved? Could it be both? As fa-

miliar as the idea of revival has become, we may be surprised to know that the Bible never refers to revival. The Bible does mention the terms, “revive,” “revived,” and “reviving,” but it never talks about revival or revival meetings. Technically, then, we are dealing with an idea that does not find definition or explanation in the Bible. Let us look, then, at how revival is defined by some who have written on the subject:

In the minds of many Christians, the word [revival] is used simply to refer to evangelistic meetings. . . . To use the word *revival* to refer to evangelistic meetings is to change the definition which history has attached to it. The word *revival* is derived from two Latin words, *re* which means “again” and *vivo* which means “to live”; the literal meaning is “to live again.”¹

Two obvious features of revival are these: it is primarily the restoration of believers (only those with life can be revived), and it is the product of the Holy Spirit’s work, not dependent on human strategy—though human beings are of course directly involved.²

What is revival? We can define it, as a period of unusual blessing and activity in the life of the Christian Church. Primarily, of course, and by definition, a revival is something that happens first in the Church and amongst Christian people, amongst believers. That, I repeat, is true by definition. It is revival; something is revived and when you say that, you mean that there is something present that has got life.³

According to these definitions, revival is aimed primarily at people who are already Christians, not unbelievers. We will examine the validity of this definition shortly, but at this point, the definition these men give about revival being for believers is important. If one accepts their definition of revival, refusal to participate in revival meetings does not make one an opponent of evangelism, since the purpose of revival is not evangelism. In the past we have had people accuse our church of being against evangelism because we did not support the revival meetings in our city. Yet, the promoters of revival meetings openly admit that their gatherings are not evangelistic crusades.

With that in mind, the following are general concerns about today's revivals and revival meetings:

1. *The Popular Ideas of Revival and Revival Meetings Do Not Find Support in the Bible*

The first and most foundational question that must be asked concerning the validity of revival and revival meetings is—*do preplanned revival meetings geared to reviving the believer find support in the Bible?* Is there any biblical evidence, whether explicitly or by principle that would support the modern notion of revival or revival meetings? Supporters of revival meetings say there are. One promoter of revival meetings wrote,

There are three great revival portions in Scripture. Habakkuk 3:2, 'O Lord revive Thy work in the midst of the years.' Psalm 85:5, 'Wilt Thou not revive us again that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?' The third reference is in Isaiah 57:15, 'Thus saith the High and lofty One that inhabits eternity whose Name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place, with Him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.'⁴

According to this author, the "three great revival portions in Scripture" are Habakkuk 3:2, Psalm 85:5, and Isaiah 57:15. Obviously, these passages use the term "revive," yet, when we examine these passages, we find they have nothing to do with revival meetings. As we have already established, the term "revival" and the concept of revival meetings are not found in Scripture. When the term "revive" is used in Scripture, it is used either in a personal sense or in relation to Israel's theocracy. So then, simply finding the term "revive" in the Bible cannot be used as a justification for the revival meetings taking place today.

Blending of Israel and the Church

Many who are supportive of revival meetings, who have written on the issue, do not approach the Scripture from what is known as a dispensational perspective. The dispensational method of Bible interpretation involves interpreting the Bible in a consistently literal and normal way. This literal approach to interpreting Scripture

involves being aware of who God was speaking to and when He was speaking to them. In the Old Testament, God was dealing primarily with the nation Israel. To them, He made specific covenants and promises of blessing and judgment. The church, which did not come into existence until thousands of years later (Acts 2), should not be confused with Israel. Nor should the covenants, promises, and experiences of Israel automatically be taken out of context and applied to the church. How does this relate to the issue of revival and revival meetings? It relates because some revivalists, in order to find a biblical basis for revival in the church age today, go to the Old Testament for support. They go to passages that speak about blessings to national Israel and apply them to the church today. They believe that the Old Testament promises of blessing to Israel can be directly applied to the church in this age since they believe the church is the new spiritual Israel. For example, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who did not approach the Bible from a dispensational perspective, states in his book, *Revival*,

Let us not forget that the camp of Israel was the, then, church of God. In the Old Testament the nation of Israel was the church in the wilderness.⁵

However, Israel and the church, contrary to Lloyd-Jones' statement, are not the same and the Bible never confuses the two. Yet this identification of the church with Israel is foundational to revival theology because the experiences of Israel in the Old Testament are supposedly to be repeated today in the church. For example, one passage sometimes used to support revival in this age is 2 Chronicles 7:13-14:

If . . . My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land, (2 Chron. 7:13-14).

This Old Testament text is often held to be applicable to the church today.⁶ But notice in this passage the Lord is speaking to a certain people—Israel, about a specific land—Palestine. This was a promise to the theocratic kingdom of Israel and is not a promise to the church and cannot be used as a support text for revival.

Another Old Testament text often taken out of context to sup-

port revival in the church age is Joel 2:23:

So rejoice, O sons of Zion,
 And be glad in the LORD your God;
 For He has given you the early rain for your vindication.
 And He has poured down for you the rain,
 The early and latter rain as before.

The issue is whether this verse supports the idea of revival in this age. Those holding to Latter Rain theology, including many in the Charismatic and Vineyard movements, have spiritualized the “early rain” to refer to the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, while interpreting the “latter rain” as an end-time revival for the church when God will pour out His Spirit in a great way. Thus, Latter Rain theology sees great revival near the end of the church-age and before the second coming of Christ. The problem with Latter Rain theology, however, is that its interpretation of the “early and latter rains” in Joel 2:23 is in error. First, Joel 2:23 is addressed to the nation Israel, not the church. This passage addresses Israel’s future in the millennial kingdom and has nothing to do with the church which was still eight hundred years away from even existing. Second, the early and latter rains mentioned are referring to literal, seasonal rains and not the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Consistent with Deuteronomy 11:13-14, God promised Israel that if they obeyed Him, he would bless their crops:

“And it shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, that *He will give the rain for your land in its season, the early and late rain that you may gather in your grain and your new wine and your oil.*” [emphasis mine]

Joel 2:23, contrary to the those who want to give it significance to the church, describes what God will do for Israel in the millennial kingdom. When Israel is restored, God will send the proper autumn and spring rainfall for their crops. Just as God blessed Israel with fall and spring rains before, He will do so again when Israel is restored to their land. No reasons exist, then, to spiritualize the early and latter rains of Joel 2:23 to refer to outpourings of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and later at the end of the church-age. Therefore, no reason exists to use this text as a support for revival at the end of the

church age. That is why, as we mentioned earlier, it is important to interpret Scripture in its context and not apply to the church what God intended for the nation Israel.

Though revivalists claim support from the Bible for revival, we have seen that the texts they use are not convincing. The passages they use deal mostly with a personal reviving and have nothing to do with today's revival meetings. Messages to Israel are taken out of their historical contexts and applied to the church. With no biblical basis for revival meetings we must ask ourselves whether we should be trying to do something we cannot support from Scripture.

Revival's Postmillennial Roots

It may come as a surprise to some, but many of our ideas about revival and revival meetings do not come from the Bible but from 18th century America. In fact, the idea of revival can be traced to what is known as The Great Awakening. The Great Awakening consisted of a series of revivals in the American colonies between 1725 and 1760. During this time an unusual number of people became saved and added to the church. The two most notable figures of the Great Awakening were George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. Edwards, who ministered in the United States, was a postmillennialist. Why is it important to know that he was a postmillennialist and what does that have to do with revival and revival meetings? To understand this connection between postmillennialism and revival we must understand what postmillennialists believe. Postmillennialists hold that the kingdom of God is being advanced in the world now, in the church age, through the preaching of the Gospel. They believe that as the Gospel is preached and people are saved, we will eventually enter a golden era of righteousness and peace known as the Millennium. At the end of this era Christ will return. Thus Christ's second coming is post-millennial, or after the Millennium. So postmillennialists expect a revival to take place in the church age before Christ comes. This ties into the Great Awakening of the middle 1700's. Being a postmillennialist, Edwards linked the salvations of the Great Awakening with what he thought to be the coming of the millennial kingdom of God. He thought that the mass conversions taking place and

the social changes that followed were evidence that the kingdom had begun. Thus the idea of revival in the church age is a postmillennial idea that leaders such as Jonathan Edwards gave to what was happening in their day. As a result, postmillennial theology has contributed to the current revival mentality that has developed to this day.

The postmillennial idea of church-age revival is flawed for two main reasons. First, the Bible teaches that the Kingdom of God will be established in the future after Christ's second coming and is not something that is advancing during this church age. The millennial reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6 chronologically follows the second coming described in Revelation 19. In addition, the New Testament never speaks of Christ's kingdom and messianic reign as spiritually operative in the church age. His millennial reign is seen as future when He comes to earth at His second coming (Matt. 25:31; Rev. 11:15). Second, the New Testament does not speak of the church undergoing a period of revival. In fact, the Bible warns that "in the last days difficult times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). "The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). The Bible, then, warns that the church will undergo apostasy, not revival. The Bible does speak of a future period of restoration and blessing for Israel after the church age when Christ establishes His millennial kingdom on the earth. Nevertheless, the Bible does not speak of a period of revival for the church.

The Influence of Charles Finney

The early 1800s was an important era for revival in America. One key leader during this time was Charles Finney. Finney, a very influential revivalist, believed that salvation and revival could be produced through the right use of means. He felt that given the right environment and mood, men would respond to the Gospel. Openly rejecting the Calvinistic view that man is totally depraved and wholly dependent on God for salvation, Finney held to the Arminian view that man is not totally depraved and that man's will is free to choose God on his own. As a result, he designed his revival services, then, to stir the emotions of his audience so they would make a decision for Christ. He wrote, "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a

miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—so much so as any other effect produced by the application of means. . . . A revival is as naturally a result of the use of means as a crop is of the use of its appropriate means.”⁷ To Finney, having a revival was just a matter of using the right means. This type of thinking, however, is obviously man-centered and makes salvation something dependent on the right use of human means, not based on the sovereign grace and work of the Holy Spirit. Finney's philosophy of salvation and revival is clearly unbiblical. Interestingly, though, the ideas and methods of Finney concerning revival continue to have a great impact on modern revival meetings. Much of what is done in today's revival meetings, including the “altar call” and emotional appeals for decisions for Christ, can be traced to him. Much of what takes place in today's revival meetings then, finds its roots in Finney more than in the Bible.

2. Today's Revival Meetings Are Experience-Oriented

Another concern with the revival meetings is the emphasis placed upon experience. Some supporters of revival believe that many of the experiences recorded in Scripture can and should be repeated in our lives today. According to them, Christians today ought to experience much of the same phenomena the saints of God did in the Bible. For example, Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his book, *Revival*, says that God's revealing of His glory to Moses in Exodus 33:18-23 should be sought by believers today:

The prayer for revival is, ultimately, a prayer based upon a concern for the manifestation of the glory of God, and remember that this can happen individually as well as collectively. Now Moses knew of the glory of God. He had not seen it, but he believed God. He had accepted the revelation and he had had odd manifestations here and there. And on the strength of this, he said, ‘Now, let me see thy glory, let it be manifested.’ *And that should be our position. . . . We know that God is there in all his glory, and the necessity is that we should be moved, as Moses was, to desire the manifestation of this glory. It is almost inconceivable, is it not, that there should be any Christian who does not offer this prayer of Moses?*⁸ [emphasis mine]

But should believers today be seeking manifestations of God's glory such as Moses had? One basic principle of Bible interpretation is that believers should not consider the experiences of people in the Bible to be normative for all believers. Furthermore, if what happened to someone in Bible times is to be considered normative for all believers, it must be in harmony with what is taught elsewhere in Scripture. Trying to duplicate experiences in Scripture can lead only to confusion and error. The experiences of Moses are not to be sought by all believers today. As the Bible states, Moses was a unique man who lived in a unique time:

Since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

It is important that God's Word clearly marks out Moses' ministry as being unique. No indication exists that anyone in Israel ever experienced anything like Moses. Nor is there any reason to believe that what Moses experienced should be sought by believers today.

Lloyd-Jones also gives other examples of experiences in the Bible that believers should be experiencing today: Isaiah's vision of the Lord sitting on His throne lofty and exalted with the train of His robe filling the temple (Isaiah 6:1-7); the apostle John's vision of the glorified Christ (Revelation 1); Saul's encounter with Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-18); the apostles seeing Christ transformed before them on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17); and Paul's being taken to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12).⁹ Concerning experiences like these Lloyd-Jones says "we must never forget that all this is possible at any time to the individual."¹⁰ Yet that statement does not take into account the unique ministries of these men. Isaiah was a prophet, Paul and John were apostles. The Bible does not suggest that their experiences are to be normative for every believer in every age.

Lloyd-Jones, anticipating this response, says,

'Ah, but,' says someone, 'that has only happened to men in the Scriptures.' No, that is not so. This is something that has gone

on happening to God's people who have realised the possibilities, and who, throughout the running centuries, have sought God himself.¹¹

Yet contrary to what Lloyd-Jones says and the examples he gives, trying to repeat the experiences of people in the Bible only leads to trouble. Except for the unique case of Moses, none of the experiences mentioned were sought out by the people involved. Just because an experience is genuine does not mean it is repeatable. Yet much of the current revival movement is based on the shaky foundation of trying to build a theology from experience.

Phenomena of Revival

Another concern with some revival meetings is the unusual phenomena that takes place there. Commenting on the experiences sometimes associated with revival, Lloyd-Jones says,

What then are these phenomena to which I am referring? It seems to me that the best way to classify them is to put them under two headings. First of all, there are certain physical phenomena. Under the influence of this mighty power, people may literally fall to the ground under conviction of sin, or even faint, and remain in a state of unconsciousness, perhaps for a considerable time. . . . Then there are people who seem to go into trances. They may be seated or they may be standing, and they are looking into the distance, obviously seeing something, and yet they are completely unconscious and unaware of their surroundings. They do not seem to be able to hear anything, nor to see anything that may be happening round and about them. They are evidently seeing something with a spiritual eye, which is not visible to others, and a state of trance is the only way in which we can describe it.¹²

Sometimes people are so convicted and feel the power of the Spirit to such an extent that they faint and fall to the ground. Sometimes there are even convulsions, physical convulsions. And sometimes people seem to fall into a state of unconsciousness, into a kind of trance, and may remain like that for hours.¹³

Experiences such as these are admittedly a part of revival. The mystical nature of such experiences is alarming. Nowhere in the

New Testament is the church told to look for and expect such mystical experiences.

This next statement by Lloyd-Jones has great implications concerning the validity of revival meetings and what takes place at them:

Today there is a great deal of very loose and dangerous talk and writing about what happened on the day of Pentecost. People go accepting uncritically the explanation that what happened on the day of Pentecost was once and for all and never to be repeated. Now, it is important that we should examine that because, if that is really true, it is very wrong to pray for revival.¹⁴

This is an important point. Lloyd-Jones admits that if the experiences of Pentecost were unique and are not to be repeated today, “it is very wrong to pray for revival.” In other words, if the experiences of Pentecost are not repeatable and normative we have no biblical basis for revival meetings and the experiences that take place with them. That is correct. What happened at Pentecost was unique to those people present then. We do not see the events of Pentecost repeated in the New Testament nor are we told to seek those experiences today. There are no verifiable cases of tongues as of fire distributing themselves on people (Acts 2:3). There are no documented cases of people speaking languages they have never learned (Acts 2:5-13). We are never told to look for these experiences. Those who experienced these things, as recorded in Scripture, were not expecting them. As a result, we should not be trying to reproduce what happened in Acts 2 nor should we try to use Acts 2 as a proof text for revival.

The Danger of Setting Aside Theology for Experience

This emphasis on experience has become pervasive in the Evangelical Church. I once met with a man who was the head of the department of theology for a large Charismatic organization in Southern California whose members came from a variety of denominations and doctrinal beliefs. I asked him what gave his organization unity, and he said, “Oh, we all share the same common experience in the Holy Spirit.” His statement made a great impact on me because the unity he described was based not on theology or core con-

victions—but on experience. Now we evangelicals who have consistently stood against the charismatic emphasis on experience have come to the same place. We have made experience the basis for what we do, not the Bible.

3. Revival Meetings Often Emphasize an Unbiblical Approach to Christian Growth

One of the major theological problems with the current revival movement is its approach to Christian growth. Revival meetings are often based on what is known theologically as “crisis sanctification.” Put simply, “crisis sanctification” is the view that a person can be saved but they do not really give their lives over totally to God until some “crisis” happens in their life. Put another way, according to this view, some (if not most) Christians do not receive changed lives at the moment of their salvation. Rather, their changed lives will come at some point after or following their salvation when they are faced with some “crisis experience.” For these Christians, they need a “crisis experience” to dramatically change their lives and bring them to the point where they submit to God in a way that did not happen at their salvation. With this approach, a person may have trusted Christ for salvation but it is not until later—maybe even years later—when some dramatic event such as a revival meeting or filling of the Holy Spirit causes real change.

Essential to the idea of crisis sanctification is the belief that there are two separate, transforming points in the life of the believer—salvation and then later sanctification. One author who is supportive of revival meetings stated, “the application of Christ’s death may begin at a crisis experience (perhaps the revival prayer room).”¹⁵ According to this statement, the application of Christ’s death and the beginning of Christian growth may not happen immediately at salvation but may happen later, perhaps at a revival prayer meeting. So a gap of time may exist between salvation and the time a believer may begin to live for God as he should. This author also said,

The revivalists stress that revival is both a crisis and a process. Many people need a crisis before they will break before God; a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Then, of course, the process of walking in the Spirit and growing in grace can begin.¹⁶

Remember that this author is referring to believers. According to him many believers need a crisis sometime after salvation before they will “break before God.” Yet can a person truly be saved who has never been broken before God? Doesn’t true salvation involve a turning from sin and a willingness to follow Christ no matter what the cost? Jesus said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me,” (Matt. 16:24). Taking up one’s cross is the path of self-denial. It is a recognition of one’s sin and unworthiness before God. It is a commitment to follow Christ, even to the point of death. By nature, becoming a disciple of Christ involves being broken before God. Yet, if this author is correct there are some Christians who are saved but have not yet been broken before God. These unbroken Christians then need a crisis to make them yield to God and at that point they can begin the process of walking in the Spirit and growing in grace. That is not correct. As we will see, the Bible teaches that the path of Christian growth begins immediately at salvation and does not begin at some point after salvation when we face some crisis experience.

Biblical View of Sanctification

We know from Scripture that when God saves people, He does more than just save them from an eternity in hell. He also works to bring them to godliness and maturity in this life. This is what is called “sanctification.” The term “sanctification” is a biblical one (see Romans 6:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3) and it simply refers to the process by which God brings the believer to spiritual maturity. The Bible teaches that this process begins immediately when a person becomes saved:

Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4).

When a person believes in Christ and is identified with Him in his death, burial, and resurrection, he is raised to “walk in newness of life.” At salvation the new Christian *immediately* begins to walk a path of increasing righteousness and holiness. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 states, “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the

old things passed away; behold new things have come.” This does not mean that a new believer is instantly mature and never sins or struggles in his Christian walk. But when a person is saved he is given a new nature and he will begin to evidence his salvation by a righteous life. Salvation and sanctification, then, are inseparable parts of God’s salvation package. When a Christian becomes saved, he is then put on the road of sanctification (Christian growth). Contrary to those who hold that a person can become a Christian and not give any evidence of being a Christian until some “crisis experience,” the Bible teaches that we start living for God immediately when we are saved. We do not need a “crisis” before we start living for God.

The path to spiritual growth and maturity begins at salvation as we walk by the Spirit and obey the Word. Certainly during our Christian lives the Lord works in different ways and may bring certain trials and experiences to help us grow, but nowhere in the Bible are we told to seek an experience after salvation that will finally get us on the road to serving the Lord as we should.

4. *Revival Meetings Often Have an Unbiblical Approach Concerning Demons*

Perhaps one of the greatest theological concerns with revival meetings is the unbiblical doctrine being promoted concerning demons. Revivalist, W.L. McLeod, for example, in the introduction to his book, *Fellowship With the Fallen*, states that he spends at least one night during his crusades to lecture on the issue of how believers can be trained in warfare against demons. By his statements he makes clear that he believes Christians can be indwelt in some way by demons.

Now whether you call it possession or invasion makes very little difference. Christians and non-Christians alike may have demons in their person and require deliverance.¹⁷

I have known of numerous cases of people who had demons who became Christians after some time but whose conversion did not take care of the demon problem.¹⁸

This issue of the demonization of the believer is a serious theological one. Here we have one prominent revivalist who believes Christians “may have demons in their person and require deliver-

ance.” While he tries in his book to make a distinction between demon possession of unbelievers and demon invasion of believers—a distinction the Bible does not make—he does teach that believers can be invaded by demons “in some cases to alarming degrees.”¹⁹ Yet nowhere in Scripture are believers told that they must be concerned about indwelling or invading demons.

Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body (1 Cor. 6:19).

The believer’s body belongs to the Holy Spirit; it does not belong to the devil. Titus 2:4 says that Christ redeemed us to be “a people for His own possession.” If we belong to Christ how can we be at the same time under the control of the devil? “You are from God, little children and have overcome them because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world,” (1 John 4:4). The “He” who is in the believer is the Holy Spirit. The “he” who is in the world is the devil. The Holy Spirit who indwells us is greater than the devil whose presence is in the world. If the devil is in the world, he cannot be in us. “We know that no one who is born of God sins, but He who was born of God, God keeps him and the evil one does not touch him,” (1 John 5:18). This is a promise to all believers. God does not allow the evil one to touch those who are His.

In his book, McLeod details how he finds out whether believers have been a victim of demonic invasion:

I normally have people go through my list of sixty areas of the occult and tell me what areas they have been into. In many, many cases this brings to light occult practices. . . . I check to find out if their parents have been so involved. This is sometimes the factor that has brought the bane into their lives.²⁰

If the person has been involved in some area or areas of the occult, then you must take it for granted that there is SOME MEASURE of demonic invasion.²¹ [Emphasis in the original].

McLeod believes that past occultic involvement by the individual or past occultic practices by the person’s parents can be the cause of demon invasion. But can past occultic involvement carry over into the life of a believer after he is saved? Not according to the

Bible.

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same, that through His death he might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is the devil (Heb. 2:14).

From this passage we see clearly that Christ's death rendered the devil "powerless." To "render powerless" means that the power to control was broken. This means the devil's power over believers was broken. No matter what occultic background we or our ancestors may have had, the devil no longer has control over us. Romans 6:4 states, "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." Salvation is a radical break from our old life. When we become identified with Christ at salvation, we are now free to "walk in newness of life." Christ gives us a fresh start, no matter what occultic background we or our parents may have had. If any form of occultic bondage carried over after our salvation, we would not be able to walk in newness of life. Notice Scripture does not say "we too may walk in newness of life, unless, of course, ancestral demons are still around." That is absurd.

Sin: Who's to Blame?

Our theology concerning demons and whether they can invade believers has a great impact on how we try to help Christians in their walk. If demons can invade believers and control their behavior in any way, then this greatly affects how we deal with sinful behavior in people's lives. If demons are to blame for sinful behavior, they, not the individual, are accountable for the actions and the old saying, "The devil made me do it" is not too far off. For example McLeod says,

Where people are plagued by evil thinking and lustful thoughts and practices, and when they find themselves lying and perhaps blaspheming God, there is very likely some degree of demonic invasion.²²

If the person has trouble reading the Bible, or praying, or fellowshiping with other believers, then you must suspect the demonic.²³

A person with demons will usually find he is unable to submit himself to God because the demons will not let him do it.²⁴

If these statements are true, virtually every believer may be a candidate for demonic deliverance. Yet what believer has never had trouble with evil and lustful thinking? Who has not had trouble with reading the Bible, praying or fellowshiping with other believers? Are these reasons to “suspect the demonic?” Why is this important? The danger is that people will go to revival meetings for help and when they mention these kinds of problems they may be told that demons are the problem. The Bible, however, does not place the blame for sinful behavior on demons. The Bible tells us “each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14). The Bible calls sinful activity “the deeds of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19), not deeds of demons. Jesus said, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness” (Mark 7:21-22). We are to blame for sin. Satan tempts and deceives but nowhere in Scripture do we see demon invasion of believers as the reason for sinful behavior.

Speaking to Demons

Not much difference exists between McLeod’s methods for dealing with demons and the traditional methods used by some Charismatics. In his chapter, “How to Deal With Demon Invasion or Possession” McLeod tells of how he goes about dealing with possessing or invading demons in people. According to him, after the person has removed all occult objects, they are to say a prayer renouncing the devil.²⁵ If the demon will not allow the person to say a prayer of renunciation, McLeod says he does the following:

When this happens I simply command the evil spirits to break their hold. . . . Be very patient here and keep rebuking the demons in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.²⁶

After this prayer of renunciation, McLeod says the person may feel unusual things such as hands or feet going numb or the feeling of electric shocks shooting through their body. Regardless, after the prayer of renunciation he says, “I then command all demons to leave

the person in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁷ Yet where in the instruction to the church are we told about hands and feet going numb or electric shocks through the body? Where are we told to be speaking to demons? On the contrary, Scripture tells us we are to “resist the devil” (James 4:7). We are to “be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9). We are to “be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might” (Eph. 6:10). We do this by putting on the “full armor of God” which involves truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer (Eph. 6:13-19). The Bible does not tell us to speak to Satan or to cast him out. We must be careful when men come up with ideas of dealing with demons that do not come from the Bible.

I am afraid that some people who go to revival meetings will be misled into thinking that many of their problems are the result of demons. They will be told that demons are the cause of certain sinful behaviors and if that demon is removed they will experience victory in those areas. The Bible though does not tell us that demons invade believers nor does it tell us we must remove demons to live productive Christian lives. The Bible does tell us that the devil is a tempter and a deceiver and we must be aware of his cunning plans. The Bible tells us that we do battle with the flesh and we must daily “walk by the Spirit” so we do not “carry out the desire of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). As we submit to God by walking in the Spirit and obeying His Word we will see victory in our Christian walks.

5. God’s Plan for Spiritual Growth Is the Church

As we have seen, revival meetings are never mentioned in Scripture as being part of God’s means to bring believers to spiritual maturity. So where can believers go to help them mature in their Christian walks? The answer is a Bible-believing local church. Of the 114 references to the church in the New Testament more than 90 refer to the local church. That is where God’s emphasis is for believers today. As Ephesians 4:11-13 states,

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of

the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.

God has given His church gifted men, who, through the ministry of the Word, help bring believers to spiritual maturity. That is God's plan. The best way for believers to grow in their Christian walks is to be actively involved with a church that believes and teaches the Word of God. As they learn from and apply the Word they will be equipped for ministry and will grow to maturity. The job of helping believers grow does not belong to the revival leader but to the Holy Spirit who uses "evangelists," "pastors," and "teachers," in the local church. The question must be asked—why do we need revival meetings if God's plan for growth is in the context of the local church?

Conclusion

The purpose of this book has been to look at the issues of revival and revival meetings from a biblical and theological standpoint. We have seen that many of the modern ideas concerning revival and revival meetings do not find support in Scripture. We should praise God for any ministry of the Word that has taken place at these meetings, but at the same time we should be wary of involving ourselves in something that does not find a basis in the Bible.

End Notes

1. Erwin W. Lutzer, *Flames of Freedom* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1976), 135-36.
2. *Ibid.*, 136.
3. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1987), 99.
4. William McLeod, *Revival: God's Work* (Canadian Fellowship, n.d.) tract.
5. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 166.
6. Duncan N. Campbell, *The Nature of God-Sent Revival* (Montvale, VA: Christ Life Publications, n..d.) 11.
7. *Charles G. Finney: An Autobiography* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, n.d.), 4.
8. Lloyd-Jones, *Revival*, 216.
9. *Ibid.*, 218.
10. *Ibid.*, 213.
11. *Ibid.*, 218-19.
12. *Ibid.*, 134.
13. *Ibid.*, 111.
14. *Ibid.*, 199.
15. Lutzer, *Flames of Freedom*, 151.
16. *Ibid.*, 158.
17. William McLeod, *Fellowship with the Fallen* (Prince Albert, Saskatchewan: Northern Canada Mission Press, n.d.) 35.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. *Ibid.*, 168.
20. *Ibid.*, 170.
21. *Ibid.*, 174.
22. *Ibid.*, 170.
23. *Ibid.*, 171.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, 176.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 177.

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