

Repentance - Renewal - Revival

by Don Rogers

It is apparent to those of us who do battle against the kingdom of darkness on a regular basis that there are a lot of strongholds that need to be pulled down. Ideally, this should be a combined effort of the body of Christ. Unfortunately, a large portion of God's people are not ready to join such an effort even if they wanted to. Their own spiritual lives would hinder them in doing so. A campaign to bring down demonic strongholds will not be accomplished with slogans, clever programs or even good spiritual techniques.

Time and again Christians have had good intentions, yet they have made little impact on our society to change it. In fact, this nation is becoming more and more ungodly. When it comes to the major issues of the day, the Christian voice is being ignored and even ridiculed. Christians are accused of being intolerant and unloving because we are advocating biblical values. There is an increasing anti-Christian sentiment that is trying to convey the message that Christians are the enemy. We are portrayed as extremists.

God has called us to go out into the world and bring about change. We are supposed to be change-makers; salt and light in a world of darkness. How have the majority of Christians responded? They have gone about business as usual. Satan has been very successful in diverting us from the path that God has laid out before us. God's people have become self-centered and self-indulgent in their lifestyles. Christ has called us to take up our cross daily, but his voice has been drowned out by the multitude of enticements that surround us. Many are satisfied to carry the name of Christ and live like the rest of the world. They are content with the world as it is and for others the task of changing the world is overwhelming. I'm glad the disciples did not think like that.

REPENTANCE

Frankly, we will not make an impact for Christ in this world unless we change! This is foundational. God's people need to take an objective inventory of their lives and start repenting. Yes, we repented when we gave our hearts to God. But that was only the beginning of what should have become a life lived in an attitude of repentance. All of us need to open our eyes and recognize what we have become. We need to see how we have been grieving the Holy Spirit by the way we are living. We cannot think about change in our lives and hope our good intentions will be acceptable. There must be change that is radical if we are to be in God's will.

The Holy Spirit desires to work in our lives to bring about change and he needs the submission of our wills. We must be willing to yield to whatever change God desires to bring about. God has made it very clear what it will take to bring healing to our land.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14

If we want to see God move in our lives and in the lives of others, there must be repentance that starts with us. God's words to Israel through Ezekiel could just as well be addressed to the Church today.

"Therefore I will judge you. O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin." Ezekiel 18:30

Jesus' revelation to John includes some very sobering words to God's people. As he addressed the church in Ephesus and acknowledged some fruit to be good, a word of rebuke was also given accompanied by a warning.

"But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; REPENT, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent." Revelation 2:4-5

God is already beginning to shake and sift and even bring temporal judgment upon the body of Christ (1 Peter 4:17). He will fulfill his eternal plan no matter what it takes. He will prepare a people to be the bride of Christ.

What is true repentance? It is being sorry for grieving God by the way you live. It is a desire to turn from your sins without any regrets and take a new path that pleases God. (2 Cor. 7:9-10) We cannot be praying as many married people pray, "Lord, change my spouse so that our marriage will be better." No, we must be praying, "Lord, start with me and change me." **Change will rarely take place unless we are willing for it to begin with ourselves.**

Satan will always seek to convince us that everything is fine in our lives. There is no need to be overly concerned about our condition because there are a lot of people who are in much worse spiritual shape than ourselves. This is how many rationalize away the need for repentance in their own lives. They permit pride and self-righteousness to take root. Lack of repentance has been the major reason why so many Christians have gone into bondage in one form or the other.

RENEWAL

If we are to impact our world for God we cannot be satisfied with only repentance. Repentance must be followed with renewal. There must be renewal in the way we think, what we desire and how we exercise our wills. **Renewal is not something we wait for God alone to accomplish. It is a change we are personally accountable to pursue.**

What I have been describing may be a little confusing to some Christians, because they only think of repentance in the context of salvation (Titus 3:5) and renewal in the context of the Holy Spirit's work on our behalf. But the scriptures also emphasize repentance and renewal in relation to godliness. God not only wants us to be saved but to be holy as well.

"You were taught to put away your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." Ephesians 4:22-24

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God - what is good and acceptable and perfect." Romans 12:1-2

The renewal of the mind involves a repentant heart, the determination to pull down every stronghold that has been established in the thoughts and desires and the taking captive of all our thoughts and making them obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) The mind is the battlefield where we are confronted by the

fiery darts of temptation. Prideful thoughts and self-righteousness or negative thoughts and self-accusation often have their source from our adversary. God wants us to be alert to the enemy's wiles and resist them. He gives us the grace to accomplish that to which he has called us. We work out our salvation cooperatively with him as he has sovereignly ordained (Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:10). He continually calls us to personal responsibility to join his program of perfecting us.

Renewal is bringing our nature under the discipline of God's truth. It is not easy, but can be accomplished by relying upon the Holy Spirit. He guides us and enables us and transforms us as we cooperate with him. Repentance and renewal in relationship to godly living is where many Christians are failing miserably in their obedience to God. The reason Satan is having such a field day in Christian lives is because there is an overwhelming lack of repentance and renewal among believers. Many have not been taught that God's word commands us to pursue holiness.

"But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.' " (1 Peter 1:15-16)

If we do not obey this command, we will permit Satan to make legal claims upon areas of our lives because of our disobedience. Much of our prayer counseling deals with these elements of repentance and renewal. These are basic spiritual principles from which we must never move.

REVIVAL

When a community of people have a spirit of repentance and begin to participate in the renewal that God desires for their lives, they become open for revival. God looks favorably upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness not only for themselves, but for others. Sadly, we must admit that we have been selfish in our desires for revival. We have been more concerned with what revival can mean for us than for others.

Christians today are basically very self-centered. Their basic interests are to get their needs met. Many move from one local church to another in pursuit of some particular fulfillment. Many do not want to commit to a local authority in the local church. They prefer to have the freedom to do what they want without anyone exercising any spiritual oversight over them. These people are quick to see the faults in others, but not themselves. They use the faults of others as an excuse for what they do. This kind of attitude is not conducive to the unity in the body of Christ or to revival. This is why issues of repentance and renewal are so vital. It almost seems as if repentance is a bad word to all but the humble.

We should not think of revival as a magic wand or cure-all for all that is wrong with our lives and circumstances. Many Christians are waiting on God to change their lives when he has called them to take responsibility for dealing with sin and relying upon his help. Although revival does make us conscious of our won sinfulness, its main purpose is to reach out and provide large numbers of people with a powerful manifestation of God's love and grace through the moving of God's Spirit upon the lives of unbelievers so they may be able to recognize their sinful state, respond to the gospel and be brought into the kingdom of God.

More and more Christians sense in their spirits that revival is imminent. I believe that God is now preparing the army that he wants in place when his Spirit moves. He is calling each of us to accountability regarding our spiritual condition. He wants holy vessels to pour out his Spirit and fill. He wants disciplined and prepared people to respond to the leading of his Spirit in any moment and do whatever he reveals. He wants His people to be sensitive to his voice and not reason away the thoughts and desires he is laying upon our hearts and minds.

This is the question we must ask. Are we ready for God's Spirit to work freely in our lives and do whatever needs to be done in order that God may be glorified and his will be accomplished? Do not say yes to this question until you have counted the cost.

The bottom line is that we will not be able to effectively attack Satan's kingdom and pull down spiritual strongholds unless we change. There has to be the desire to change and then there must be the step of faith to appropriate the change with God's help. Waiting for some mystical experience that will eradicate all the obstacles is a fantasy and not biblically sound. God calls each of us to responsibility to affect that change and to depend upon Him to complete that change.

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