

Revival and Reformation

Discernment: The Safeguard of Revival

Lesson #8 for August 24, 2013

Scriptures: John 17:3; 1 John 2:3-6; Matthew 23:27-28; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7.

1. In this series about *Revival and Reformation*, we need to learn how to determine what is true revival versus false revival? There are those who suggest that the ultimate example or proof of revival is the presence of miracles. What is a miracle? Are there such a thing as a “false miracle”? Are there clear ways to determine which is a true miracle and which is a false miracle? And how do we determine the source of a miracle? We need to remember that Jesus and others in the Bible clearly said that miracles can be performed by Satan. (Matthew 7:21-23; 24:24; Revelation 13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20) Are “signs and wonders” always a clear proof of a true revival? No!
2. Let us lay down some basic principles. The purpose of all true religion including revival and reformation is to get to know God better. (John 17:3; Hebrews 10:7) Any time our eyes are turned away from Jesus to focus on our own experience in one way or another, we are walking on dangerous ground. The Holy Spirit who was responsible for giving us the Scriptures will never lead us away from the Scriptures. Jesus Himself said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63)
3. So, what is the way in which the Holy Spirit interacts with our human minds and experience? The Holy Spirit interacts with us at four levels:
 1. He gives us life. (Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17:25,28; *RH*, December 2, 1890 par. 15)
 2. He draws us and woos us into living better lives. (Genesis 6:3; Psalm 51:11)
 3. He convicts and converts those who are willing to listen to Him. (Joel 2:28-29; John 16:8; Acts 2:17-21)
 4. In order to build up the church, He gives spiritual gifts (are these talents?) to those who have properly prepared themselves. (1 Corinthians 12:4,8-11,28; Ephesians 4:11)
4. There are those who believe that the essence of religion and spirituality is to let God’s Spirit take control of us. It is interesting to notice that when talking about the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, the last—and perhaps the most important—item in the list of the fruit of the Spirit is “self-control.”
5. Why do you do what you do?

If you are a believer and are seeking to do God’s will, what makes you willing to obey?

Could you say, “I do what I do because God has told me to, and He has the power to reward and destroy”? Is this why you don’t murder or commit adultery, because God has said you mustn’t? You would otherwise, but you can’t afford to incur His displeasure.

This might be all right for a beginner or a little child, but it suggests that God’s laws are arbitrary and do not make good sense in themselves. That does not speak very favorably of God.

Would you rather say, “I do what I do as a believer because God has told me to, and I love Him and want to please Him”? Is this why you don’t steal or tell lies? You would see nothing wrong or harmful about doing these things. It is

just that you want so much to please God. For some reason He does not like it when you steal or lie, and since He has been so good to us, you feel under some obligation to please Him. It would only be grateful and fair.

Again, this might be all right for a beginner or child. It might even be progress beyond the obedience prompted only by fear of punishment and desire of reward. But it still implies an arbitrariness in God's commandments and does not speak so well of His character and government.

There is another possible approach to obedience. Could you say this? "I do what I do because I have found it to be right and sensible to do so, and I have increasing admiration and reverence for the One who so advised and commanded me in the days of my ignorance and immaturity." Then hastening to add, "Being still somewhat ignorant and immature, I am willing to trust and obey the One whose counsel has always proved to be so sensible, when He commands me to do something beyond my present understanding."—A. Graham Maxwell, *I Want to Be Free*, pp. 34,35

6. Unfortunately, we tend to go back and forth between doing God's will and rebelling or sinning. So, the lowest level of obedience—which actually is disobedience—is to say, "I do what I do because I want to and not because God wants me to!" At that point in time we are, in fact, saying to God, "Leave me alone for a little bit, I want to do what I want to do right now."
7. Repeatedly, the Bible and the spirit of prophecy remind us that spiritual life is all about following the example of Jesus. It is not just slavish obedience to a set of rules.

The man who attempts to keep the commandments of God from a sense of obligation merely—because he is required to do so—will never enter into the joy of obedience. He does not obey. When the requirements of God are accounted a burden because they cut across human inclination, we may know that the life is not a Christian life. True obedience is the outworking of a principle within. It springs from the love of righteousness, the love of the law of God. The essence of all righteousness is loyalty to our Redeemer. **This will lead us to do right because it is right**—because right doing is pleasing to God.—*Christ's Object Lessons* 97,98 (1900)

A sullen submission to the will of the Father will develop the character of a rebel. By such a one service is looked upon as drudgery. It is not rendered cheerfully, and in the love of God. It is a mere mechanical performance. [If he dared, such a one would disobey. His rebellion is smothered, ready to break out at any time in bitter murmurings and complaints.] Such service brings no peace or quietude to the soul. *MS 20*, 1897 (*MR # 970*); *Signs of the Times*, July 22, 1897 (3ST 400:2:1) - section in [. . .] omitted in *That I May Know Him* p. 120; *12MR* 236

These two statements are incredibly significant. **All true obedience means to do what is right because we want to.** The steps above are the normal steps in maturity.

All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that **when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.** The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual

obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, **sin will become hateful to us.** (DA 668.3)

8. What impact does it have on us when we truly get to know God? What is implied by the idea that to know Him is to love Him? Does God ever ask us to do anything which is not ultimately for our best good? We may not want to obey at the time; but, it is right to do so!
9. We need to learn to do right because it is right—not because it might give us some temporary warm feeling of satisfaction or joy. That is, we need to act from principle. What about the two brothers in Matthew 21:28-32? Did either of them act from principle?
10. Has God asked us to do anything that is not ultimately for our best good? Among those who have claimed to be followers of God down through the centuries, there has been a tendency to lean in one direction or the other: into cold formalism or fanaticism. The Pharisees had worked out so many rules for living and so many ways to circumvent those rules that it was virtually impossible to follow all of the rules.
11. On the other hand, Christ said that when He comes again there will be those who will claim to have been mighty miracle workers but who never “knew” Him. (Matthew 7:21-23)

What kind of faith is it that overcomes the world? It is that faith which makes Christ your own personal Saviour—that faith which, recognizing your helplessness, your utter inability to save yourself, takes hold of the Helper who is mighty to save, as your only hope. It is faith that will not be discouraged, that hears the voice of Christ saying, “Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world, and My divine strength is yours.” It is the faith that hears Him say, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (RH, August 26, 1890 par. 9; *Reflecting Christ* 21.2; *TMK* 166.5; *OFC* 126.4)

12. False revivals often involve giant waves of feeling which are related to “signs and wonders.” Genuine revivals involve changed lives.
13. We have already noted that in addition to God performing miracles, Satan also has that ability. What do we know about Satan working miracles in our day? (2 Thessalonians 2:9-12; Matthew 24:11-13,24; Revelation 13:13-14; 16:13-14; 19:20) God was suggesting that Satan will work miracles that are so impressive that it is not even safe for saints to expose themselves to those miracles! Human beings are often overwhelmed by what appears to be a miracle. Seeking for the spectacular is a dangerous thing to do because Satan will do everything possible to produce what he thinks might mislead us.
14. Remember that true revival produces changed and obedient lives. So, what are the results of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit? Some results seem to be evidenced by qualities in the lives of true Christians. They are described in Romans 12:6-8. These people are helpful, hospitable, able to exhort others, and able to teach. Ephesians 4:11-12 suggest that some of the gifts lead to true callings such as those of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors/teachers. But, whatever gifts the Holy Spirit might give, it should ultimately produce the fruit of the Spirit as suggested in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control.
15. Have you ever spoken to someone who believes that s/he has received a special gift from the Holy Spirit—perhaps even talking in tongues? How does s/he feel about her/his gift? What would you say to her/him? If you question the source of one’s gift, how does that person react? It is important to remember the parable of Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus. What was the conclusion Jesus drew? “If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from death.” (Luke 16:31, *GNB*) How could you have a more impressive miracle than that?

16. How does God communicate with human beings? God does not have a way of bypassing our minds. He must work through the nervous system—that He created in us—to communicate His ideas to us.

The brain nerves which communicate with the entire system are the only medium through which Heaven can communicate to man and affect his inmost life. Whatever disturbs the circulation of the electric currents in the nervous system lessens the strength of the vital powers, and the result is a deadening of the sensibilities of the mind. (2T 347,1869)

17. Often, people have used various substances from alcohol to hallucinogenic drugs to try to produce what they believe is a spiritual experience. That is the reason why alcohol is sometimes called “spirits”! But, God tells us that any method we might use to bypass the clear thinking processes in evaluating the truth of Scripture is a mistake. Remember that the ultimate evidence of revival is a changed, obedient life. In our world today, so many people are depending for their experiences on various kinds of external influences. Many are depending on drugs—either illicit or prescribed drugs. People do not want to be good; they just want to feel good! Others depend upon music or movies or perhaps the Internet. While some of these things may be necessary under certain circumstances, we must remember that if we allow ourselves to be controlled by external influences, the Devil will find ways to control those influences and thus control us. That could turn into a modern form of “demon possession.”
18. The challenge for each one of us is to spend enough time learning of Jesus so that our lives are transformed to become like Him. This will be our **eternal** goal. The apostle John tells us in 1 John 3:1-3 that we can become like Jesus if we see Him as He is. That is what it means to really know Christ.
19. What does it mean to live a life of loving obedience? What kind of people will make up God’s final, remnant people? (Revelation 14:12) Let us remember that:

Those who endeavor to obey all the commandments of God will be opposed and derided. They can stand only in God. In order to endure the trial before them, they must understand the will of God as revealed in His word; they can honor Him only as they have a right conception of His character, government, and purposes, and act in accordance with them. **None but those who have fortified the mind with the truths of the Bible will stand through the last great conflict.** To every soul will come the searching test: Shall I obey God rather than men? The decisive hour is even now at hand. Are our feet planted on the rock of God’s immutable word? Are we prepared to stand firm in defense of the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus? (*Great Controversy* 593.2)

20. God promises to impart to us the characteristics of the Holy Spirit if we spend time with Jesus in prayer, Bible study, and witnessing. And He knows which gifts and which fruit are most appropriate and most needed in our lives. If we work on producing the fruit of the Spirit, God can be trusted to give us the correct gifts when He sees it is appropriate.

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