

The King's Highway

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The Church Must Repent

by Elmer D. Riggs in "Free Methodist"

The Church is the greatest organization on earth, and it is by and through the church that God has ordained that the world shall be evangelized. We recognize, further, that the church is made up of individuals who are not perfect, and who are hindered by human traits and sometimes spiritual dullness in carrying out the will and purpose of God. Still further, we recognize that God is constantly striving with the church to equip and challenge her to do His full will. This being true, I wish to talk about revival.

Revival is not evangelism. Evangelism is the result of revival. Revival is not keeping the rules of the church to which you belong. The Pharisees, whom Jesus bitterly condemned, kept all the rules carefully. Revival is not church activity and growth. All over the country there is great increase in church buildings, church membership, church and Sunday-school attendance, and sundry church activities, but there is little evidence of genuine revival.

Revival is the resurgence of spiritual life and energy in the church totally. Revival is the church repenting and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Revival is the church seeing a world vision, and moving to make that vision come true.

Now for the challenge from God's Word, will you read Revelation 2:1-5, noting this phrase in verse 4, "thou hast left thy first love." Then read Acts 2:41-47, noting verse 42, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." In Acts we have the picture of the church being true to the pattern given. In Revelation we have the picture of the church in need of revival. For comparison let's place the picture of our church alongside.

How does our church compare with the apostolic church just referred to in the Book of Acts—in prayer committal? in oneness of intent and purpose? in the acceptance of the command of the Great Commission? in moving to carry out the God-assigned obligation of the church to reach the unreached with the gospel message?

We live in a generation when the church in general does not want revival. The church is quite willing to support what is usually called a revival effort, which really means no more than a drive for new members. The members of the churches are willing to attend a series of meetings in fair number to hear the evangelist give it to the sinners, but resentment arises quickly when the same evangelist calls the Christians to get right with God. Somehow our theology has convinced us that we got religion once and have no further need. It's true that we believe in backsliding and practice it, but we don't want to admit it.

As one of God's spokesmen I can testify that it is easy to preach to the unconverted. There was a day when the church would hear a call to humble themselves and

pray, and seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways. Has that day passed?

Our generation is one of which the Bible speaks in reference to a people who will not endure sound doctrine. There has been so little challenge and call to genuine revival that the congregation looks upon it as some fanatical binge of a well-meaning but mis-guided preacher.

Charles G. Finney said: "There is only here and there a minister in the country who knows how to probe the church when it is in a cold and backslidden condition so as to effectually waken the members and keep them awake. They have a form of piety which wards off the truth, while at the same time it is just the kind of piety that has no power or efficiency. They are often employed about the machinery of religion, and pass for good Christians, but are no use in a revival."

As a pastor I am forward for prayer for the supply of any need I may have at this point. And I want sincerely to recognize my God-given obligation and conscience-bound duty to stir the church from her nest of Laodicean response. A great evangelist of our day said recently that a series of revival sermons addressed to church members will have rough going these days. Then I reckon we are now approaching a period of "rough going," for the sign boards clearly indicate to me that we have reached that section of the road marked "Revival Series." So fasten your seat belts and start praying with me.

Those who profess to be Christians are the only ones who can be revived. The very idea of revival presupposes spiritual life, but life that is sickly, and in need of vitality, of vigor, of strength. I am of the strong conviction that most church members do not intend to repent. They do not intend to give up the things of the world that are opposed to Christ. They do not intend to permit Jesus to really become Lord of their lives. They do not intend—and are even refusing—to pay the price for revival. Of course they will come on Sunday morning—that's the accepted thing to do—but will stay at home the rest of the week. The faithful few will be loyal and stand by with their best, but the majority of the membership of the church will not expose itself to revival. It will be argued by some, if the preacher is faithful, and the Word of God is preached in the power of the Spirit, will not this overpower all resistance on the part of the unwilling?

Do you remember that Jesus could do no mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief? Do you question that He preached the Word of God? Do you question that He was filled with the Spirit of God? Do you think that the preacher in your pulpit can succeed where Jesus failed? Do you think your preacher can see success where Jesus had none? In the light of these facts, then, is not our situation a hopeless one? Should we not just simply hold the fort and attempt no aggressive move against the

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