

# Puritan Reformed Theology



# Puritan Reformed Theology

*Historical, Experiential, and Practical Studies for the Whole of Life*

Joel R. Beeke



**REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS**

Grand Rapids, Michigan

*Puritan Reformed Theology*  
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*For the*  
**Faculty, Staff, Students, Donors,  
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of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary,  
with heartfelt gratitude for your prayers, loyalty,  
and hard and able work  
for the past twenty-five years,  
establishing and growing, by God's grace,  
an international Reformed seminary that promotes  
biblical, confessional, experiential, and practical ministry.  
I love you all and am grateful to all of you  
and pray that God may continue to use you and all of us  
for the furtherance of His kingdom here on earth  
in anticipation of His eternally perfect kingdom hereafter.





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## **Introduction: A Vision for Theological Education**

Time flies on eagle's wings. It is hard to believe I am writing this introduction on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (PRTS). To mark this special occasion, Reformation Heritage Books (RHB) is publishing in this book the articles that I wrote for PRTS's *Puritan Reformed Journal* in its first decade of publication. I originally agreed to serve as the primary editor for our seminary's journal for one decade, and now I serve as assistant editor to Dr. William VanDoodewaard, who has graciously agreed to be the primary editor. I have the privilege here of presenting my articles from the first decade of the PRJ to a wider audience. I am grateful to both PRTS and RHB for this opportunity.

The goal of my writing ministry has always been to serve the church of Jesus Christ. I feel called strongly to bring Reformed and Puritan theology to bear on all of life through biblical, systematic, historical, experiential, practical, pastoral, and contemporary studies—hence the title and divisions contained in it.

In this introduction, I provide a brief biblical and historical vision for Christian theological education, a short history of the development of theological education at PRTS over the past twenty-five years (forgive me for waxing a bit nostalgic here), and an expression of heartfelt gratitude to those whom God has greatly used for this ministry over the past two and a half decades.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Biblical Vision for Theological Education**

Most Christians view seminaries through the immediate needs of the local church.<sup>2</sup> When a church's pulpit becomes vacant, the congregation must look for a new pastor to faithfully preach God's Word and lead the church. Through

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1. In a sense, this volume is a companion to my *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), which I published on the occasion of PRTS's tenth anniversary. That book was reprinted in 2006 by Evangelical Press.

2. Thanks to Paul Smalley for assistance on this section of my introduction.

the years, seminaries have been established for this important purpose. However, Scripture presents a larger, grander picture of how Christian theological education fits into God's plan of glorifying His Son through the redemption of the nations. Let's start with the biblical roots found in the writings of the apostle Paul.

If ever there was a strategic, missionary-minded theologian, it was Paul. We see something of his vision for theological education in the only place in Scripture that uses the word "school"—namely, Paul's teaching center in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19:8–10, at the school of Tyrannus. Here is a model of a school that is a center for preaching, resisting, teaching, and sending.

First, a theological school should be *a center for preaching*. Paul's ministry in the synagogue and the school of Tyrannus was characterized by speaking with freedom and confidence, even in the face of enemies of the truth—a confidence given supernaturally by the Spirit. Paul made logical arguments to establish Christian doctrines based on the law and the gospel of Holy Scripture. He labored to convince his hearers and move them to a long-term response of faith and obedience. This is the calling of centers for theological education, that they would be schools where men learn by example and instruction what it is to preach by the power of the Holy Spirit that system of doctrines found in Scripture in a manner that is biblical, doctrinal, experiential, and applicational.

Second, a theological school should be *a center for resisting*. Paul's school in the lecture hall of Tyrannus was born out of persecution and the necessity of separation. Though Paul loved his kinsmen according to the flesh, "he departed from them, and separated the disciples" (Acts 19:9), both to preserve the church from false teaching and to protect its witness from compromise by association with unbelievers. A faithful seminary must be countercultural. It must separate itself from worldliness. The gospel wins the elect, but it hardens others. The gospel declares "the kingdom of God" (v. 8) and thus demands that sinners repent and turn back to God (Acts 20:21). Theological education must not be at peace with this world but must threaten its false gods, whether they be the self-righteousness of legalists or the materialism of pagans. We must be prepared to train men for gospel conflict in and against the world.

Third, a theological school must be *a center for teaching*. In the school of Tyrannus, the apostle Paul was "disputing daily," even for "the space of two years" (Acts 19:9–10). Paul poured his time and energy into teaching and reasoning with people from the Holy Scriptures. Although this certainly included evangelizing unbelievers, in the context it also reflects Paul's concern to ground "the disciples" of Christ more deeply in biblical truth after they separated from the synagogue. Paul was teaching them Christ from the Word, and he stayed in

Ephesus to invest in this ministry for two years. That is a huge commitment for a man whose ministry ordinarily consisted of traveling to many places to preach the gospel to as many people as possible (Rom. 15:19–21). Paul may have invested fifteen hundred to eighteen hundred hours of teaching in Ephesus, more than many seminary students receive.<sup>3</sup> It is no wonder that Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is one of the most glorious theological gems in the New Testament. All this indicates an intentional and focused time of teaching people the Word of God. Just as the faithful minister must devote himself to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4), so the faithful seminary must devote itself to a rigorous schedule of teaching and academic study.

Fourth, a theological school should be *a center for sending*. The result of Paul's school was not merely that the church in Ephesus became doctrinally grounded or even that Ephesus was reached with the gospel, but "that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10). "Asia" here refers to the Roman province of Asia Minor, what is today the western portion of Turkey. The entire region was reached with the gospel. While it is possible that Paul went on preaching tours to some of these towns, other preachers like Epaphras went to other towns (Col. 1:7). In other words, this was not just a school where Paul taught but a school where Paul taught teachers (2 Tim. 2:2). Theological education aims to raise up laborers both to serve existing churches but also to establish new churches.

### A Historical Vision for Theological Education

We see this biblical vision played out in history in the Reformed churches. At crucial times in church history such as revival and reformation, seminaries have served as centers for the worldwide spread of the gospel, the growth of the church, and the expansion of the kingdom of God. That was particularly so during the Protestant Reformation. As refugees poured into Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin labored long and hard to furnish them with a "school of Christ" to ground people in the truths of Scripture and the Reformed faith, which they carried back to their homelands in virtually all parts of Europe.

Later, as Reformed and Presbyterian Christians emigrated to North America, they soon realized that Europe's academies, seminaries, and universities could not provide them with more than a trickle of candidates for ministry in the New World. After the American Revolution, that trickle all but ceased.

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3. The typical seminary student receives about 1,100 to 1,350 hours of teaching in a three-year master of divinity program.

People of faith saw what was needed and began to establish seminaries in the United States. For example, in New York City, John Mitchell Mason (1770–1829) of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church and John Henry Livingston (1746–1825) of the Dutch Reformed Church jointly trained generations of ministers for churches in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere. William Tennent (1673–1746), a Presbyterian, organized “Log College” near Philadelphia to supply the needs of churches stirred by the power of the Great Awakening. Alexander Dobbin (1742–1809), a Reformed Presbyterian, and John Anderson (1748–1830) of the Associate Presbyterian Church, headed west to start seminaries under the most primitive of conditions. They too trained several generations of faithful preachers and pastors as well as laymen.

William Proudfit (1732–1802) of the Associate Presbyterian Church in Scotland emigrated from Scotland to London, Ontario, when the city was still being hewn from the forest. He stayed there for almost two decades, planting the Reformed faith deep in the soil of the area. Among his many tasks was to found a seminary, now known as Knox College in Toronto, to train men for gospel outreach throughout the province.

In the nineteenth century, the Second Great Awakening challenged believers to participate in worldwide evangelism and missions. As communication and travel conditions improved, Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey was founded in 1812. Its renowned professors Archibald Alexander (1772–1851), Samuel Miller (1769–1850), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), Archibald A. Hodge (1823–1886), and Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921) trained nearly six thousand ministers in less than a century to defend Reformed interpretations of Scripture. These professors also provided the intellectual, spiritual, and practical foundations for twentieth-century evangelicalism. Other lesser-known American seminaries became centers of missionary inspiration, information, recruitment, and training. Governing boards reported that large numbers of students were volunteering to go to newly opening mission fields across the world.

As churches grew on these mission fields, native converts were sometimes sent back to American seminaries to be trained for leadership in the infant churches and new colleges. These men then became the mentors of others in their homelands, establishing theological training centers there. Simple addition quickly gave way to multiplication. Though Christ is the builder of His church, orthodox Reformed seminaries have proven to be effective instruments in the hands of Christ under the direction of the Spirit.

### **A Brief History of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**

The word “seminary” originally meant a plant nursery where seeds would be grown into plants that would then be transplanted into orchards, fields, and yards where they would flourish and multiply. At Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, God has given us students from thirty different denominations and nearly as many countries, including Canada, England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, India, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Australia, the Philippines, Kazakhstan, China, Korea, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. One of my great joys is knowing that with each graduation we send out faithful men to the uttermost parts of the earth. Fifty percent of our students come to us from outside of North America. By God’s grace, our seminary serves as an arm of the church in fulfilling the Great Commission. This is the high calling and tremendous potential for theological education: to establish centers of preaching, resisting, teaching, and sending (note the acronym of these four words, PRTS) that are seedbeds of leaders for the church among all nations.

Over the past twenty-five years, we have been humbled by and are thankful for the remarkable ways in which the Lord has blessed our ever-growing seminary. PRTS began with me as the sole professor in 1995. The newly birthed Heritage Reformed denomination appointed me to undertake this task along with continuing as pastor of the Heritage Reformed Congregation in Grand Rapids. At that historic classis meeting in Ontario, the question was raised by an elder, “What shall we call the new school?” Another elder quickly replied, “The Heritage Netherlands Reformed Theological Seminary.” When I responded that that name was too long and too restrictive because we wanted to reach the world with biblical Reformed teaching and preaching that was confessional, experiential, and practical, I was asked by another delegate what I thought the school should be named. I replied, “I really have no idea. Well, we definitely want to be Reformed, but we also want to stress piety in our training—the kind of piety the Puritans possessed, so I suppose something like Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.” “So moved,” said another elder. It was seconded and passed unanimously with no further discussion!

In those early years in the late 1990s, we leaned temporarily on the Protestant Reformed Theological School to teach our students in certain areas, such as exegesis and church order, but help was soon on the way. After a few years the Free Reformed churches expressed an interest in joining our fledgling endeavors and appointed Dr. Gerald Bilkes to the task. And what a godsend he has been to me and this institution for the past two decades! He ably taught many of the Old Testament and New Testament courses and exegesis.

Within ten years of opening its doors, PRTS had outgrown its building. Construction began on our current facility at 2965 Leonard NE in Grand Rapids, and it was dedicated to the Lord's service in the fall of 2004. This first building was twenty thousand square feet and had a price tag of three million dollars. At our regular prayer times each morning, one of our staff prayed often throughout 2004 that the entire building would be paid for by the evening of dedication. I finally felt obliged to inform him that it may not be best to pray for that since it sounded a bit like Gideon putting out his fleece, which is not something we are generally supportive of now that the entire sacred canon is written. Moreover, realistically speaking, this was not going to happen anyway as we were far from our goal. Surprisingly, however, by dedication evening, \$2.88 million had been raised, by God's grace, with only \$120,000 needed to pay the remainder of the bills. Five minutes before the evening program opened, a friend wanted to speak with me in my study and then put something in my hand and quickly left, saying, "I think you may need this." It was a check for \$120,000! When I told the audience that evening that we would not be taking up an offering for the building after all because it was entirely paid for, everyone was astonished. We could actually hear the three hundred attendees inhale then exhale almost in unison in a spontaneous expression of surprise and awe for what God had done!

In October of 2005, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson dedicated our Puritan Research Center (PRC) to God's service. The PRC is a unique part of our library intended to provide people around the world with access to a wide variety of Puritan literature and to foster a deeper appreciation for the Puritan tradition. It is one of the world's largest and most diverse collections of Puritan literature, both in primary and secondary sources. The PRC functions include (1) promoting ground-breaking research, (2) fostering education and publication for Puritan and post-Reformation studies, (3) spawning internationally recognized research centers to strengthen both the church and the academy, (4) promoting primary and secondary resource materials for the majority world and beyond, and (5) bringing distant communities and PRTS together through digital research, education, and publication. Today we have affiliated centers of the PRC located at Hapdong Theological Seminary, South Korea, and the Theological University of Apeldoorn, the Netherlands.

After we entered our new building and established the PRC, the seminary began to grow substantially. In 2007, Dr. David Murray from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) joined the faculty as professor of Old Testament and practical theology. He proved to be of immense help as our third full-time professor.

In 2010, Dr. William VanDoodewaard became associate professor of church history at PRTS and assumed all the church history courses that I had been teaching so that I could focus on systematic theology and homiletics. Two years later, PRTS hired Dr. Michael P. V. Barrett as vice president for academic affairs and academic dean and professor of Old Testament, as well as Dr. Mark Kelderman as dean of students and spiritual formation. All these men have been great gifts of God to PRTS and to me in particular and have served our Lord and His church well. Our team of six professors finally was adequate to the task at hand.

However, the seminary was once again becoming too small to hold our increasing student body. Therefore, an extensive addition, effectively doubling the size of the footprint of the original building, plus the addition of a basement, was completed in 2014. Regretfully, I told the staff that since the Lord seldom does miracles twice in a row, we should definitely not expect that this time the entire building of \$3.6 million would be paid for by the evening of dedication. To the astonishment of us all, however, two days before the Friday dedication \$3.54 million had been raised. On that Wednesday a donor called and asked me how much more was needed for the building. I said, "\$60,000." "But what about your operation fund?" the donor asked. "Do you have enough to pay your faculty and staff next week at month's end?" "No," I said, "we are near zero." "Well, how much more do you need for that?" the donor asked. "Another \$65,000," I said. "Well," the donor replied, "I don't have \$125,000 to give just now, but I will call you in a few days to let you know what I can give." Two hours later, that donor called back. "I was able to free up some money," the donor said, "and I want you to know that a \$125,000 check is in the mail to you; you should have it by Friday." We received this check four hours before the dedication service. The Lord did it again!

A few years later, PRTS added a PhD program in both historical theology (2016) and biblical studies (2017). Our long-term vision for this is that we might assist in reaching the goal some decades from now, if Christ tarries, that each nation in the world having a significant Reformed presence would also have at least one thoroughly sound and Reformed seminary where all the professors teach from a biblical, Reformed, confessional, and experiential perspective. And thus students from these nations would no longer have to leave their native countries to get such a solid education. To support our PhD program, four additional full-time faculty members were hired: Dr. Adriaan Neele as director of the PhD program and professor of historical theology; Dr. Stephen Myers as associate professor of historical theology; Dr. Greg Salazar as assistant professor of historical theology; and Dr. Daniel Timmer as professor

of biblical studies (together with assistance from Dr. Barrett). Each of these professors have done well, and under Dr. Neele's able leadership our programs have grown considerably. This fall we are scheduled to open a new PhD degree in systematic theology, of which Dr. Myers will be the primary instructor and I will be the secondary instructor.

### **The Present Ministry of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary**

Over the years, the seminary also has had over thirty visiting professors/instructors from around the world to provide module courses and provide assistance for our ten full-time faculty members. And supporting the faculty has been a growing administrative staff. Currently, Dr. Jonathon Beeke serves as registrar and director of admissions and assessment as well as part-time instructor, Marjoleine de Blois as faculty assistant, Darryl Bradford as video producer/editor, Ann Dykema as administrative secretary and finances, Chris Engelsma as director of distance learning, Chris Hanna as director of marketing and development, Giselle Huang as course designer and TEEC instructor, Seth Huckstead as IT director, Henk Kleyn as vice president for operations, Laura Ladwig and Kim Dykema as librarians, Rod MacQuarrie as Director of UX and Digital Strategy, and Paul Smalley as research/teaching assistant to me. We could not ask for a better, more dedicated, and qualified staff. They are an incredible, foundational, and essential part of the running, stability, and growth of PRTS.

From 1995 until the present, PRTS has grown from 4 students to 224 students. Alumni are serving the church in various ways: preaching and pastoring, teaching as seminary presidents or professors, working in international or domestic missions, church planting, and pursuing further education. And in 2018–2019 PRTS felt called to build a dorm complex, so my wife and I now have fifty-three new neighbors—theological students and their wives and children—literally in our front yard! We love having this little so-called Puritan village in front of our home. And by God's grace, this entire complex is now paid for as well.

The seminary offers four programs designed to meet the needs of church and ministry: the master of divinity (MDiv) degree, the master of arts (religion) degree, the master of theology (ThM) degree, and the doctor of philosophy (PhD) degree. Our programs are demanding and thorough; we believe that there are no shortcuts to proper preparation for ministry. Graduates find that the work done at PRTS is foundational, instructive, and invaluable for the rewarding obligations of their vocation and ministries. As of 2014, PRTS has been fully accredited by the Commission on Accrediting of the Association



of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (ATS) for its MDiv, MA, and ThM degrees, and as of 2018, the PhD degrees have been fully accredited as well. In the near future, we hope with God's help to open a full MA program in counseling—both in-house and long distance—under the leadership of Dr. Kelderman, who has recently acquired his DMin degree in counseling. We also hope to establish a PhD and a DMin degree in homiletics in a few years as the Lord provides.

The vision for a global and worldwide dissemination of the core principles of PRTS was expanded. By God's grace, PRTS has reached many additional students throughout the world with a robust biblical, Reformed, and experiential theological education. The seminary's leadership team, spearheaded by Dr. Neele, has identified strategic regions throughout the world that have been lacking the sort of theological education offered at PRTS. Working closely with like-minded institutional leaders from each of these regions, partnerships have been established with four schools in Cairo (Egypt), London (UK), São Paulo (Brazil), and Taipei (Taiwan), where PRTS and local faculty work together to offer an accredited PRTS master of theology (ThM) degree program in biblical studies, historical theology, and systematic theology. At these sites our faculty teaches 50 percent of the courses, and the partner school's faculty teaches 50 percent of the courses. In each of these locations, as of early this year, the partner school has been assessed by ATS and approved to offer the accredited PRTS degree program. In each case, on completing this degree, students will receive an accredited ThM degree from PRTS. We are grateful to have these four campus extensions for the ThM degree and pray that God will bless all involved with these campuses—faculty, students, and staff alike—to the furtherance of His glory and the growth and maturation of His worldwide church.

As we look to the future in total dependence on the Lord, we are excited about the prospect of training part of the next generation of pastors, theological instructors, missionaries and church planters, and Bible school and seminary presidents. In many parts of the world, Christians are hungry for sound theological instruction that not only grips the mind but also enflames the heart and directs men, women, and children to love the Lord their God with their entire heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love their neighbor as themselves. We at PRTS believe that this sort of Christian understanding and experience can only be fully grasped by growing in appreciation for the richness of the biblical, confessional, experiential, and practical Reformed faith. For more information on PRTS and its programs, please visit us online at <https://www.prts.edu>.

### Acknowledgments

On reaching this anniversary milestone at PRTS, I have many to thank. First, I wish to express my gratitude to God for granting us a faculty that is increasingly becoming known throughout the Reformed, English-speaking world for upholding biblical, Reformed, confessional, experiential, and practical truth and principles—and for teaching God’s truth ably and humbly, without shame or capitulation to man-centered desires. I thank God for the giftedness of my esteemed fellow professors and for the spirit in which we can co-labor as brothers in Christ to God’s glory and for the good of souls. In dependency on the Spirit, let us continue to train our students faithfully so that God may be glorified, the church of Christ edified, and sinners around the world called to repent of their sins and to seek and find forgiveness, comfort, and joy in the King of glory, the Son of God.

Huge heartfelt gratitude also goes to our gifted staff for all your zealous work for God’s church and kingdom. Your diligent work and tireless efforts have not gone unnoticed. I certainly would not trade our staff at PRTS for any other seminary staff in the world. I thank especially Henk Kleyn for his loving management of staff and for the Christlike, peaceable spirit of unity that exudes from you all. A special thanks personally from me to all of you. I know that my work would not be nearly as effective without you. Thanks so much for making your gifts available to me and to the faculty above and beyond the call of duty.

And where would we be without our students! Again, I would not trade our student body for any other in the world. Students, thank you for being you and for entrusting your education to us! You are very special to the entire faculty—more special than you know. Nearly every adjunct faculty member who teaches a module class at PRTS says to me at some point something like this: “You have a remarkable student body here. They are so interested, so godly, ask so many good questions—they are just a joy to teach!” And they are right! We love you and pray that God will use you greatly for His glory, the upbuilding of His church, and the tearing down of the strongholds of Satan throughout your lives.

Chris Hanna and I—and everyone in our seminary—also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to our donors. Without you, these facilities and this ministry would not exist. A double thanks to those of you who give sacrificially because you believe so much in what we are trying to do, and you understand that seminaries are, in many ways, the backbone of the entire Christian enterprise. Generally speaking, without good training, few servants of God will excel in their callings to God’s glory and the good of souls. It has always impressed me that our most generous donors almost always respond to my thanks with

servant-hearted responses like this: “Please don’t feel a need to thank me; this money really doesn’t even belong to me. I am just a channel through which God’s gifts pass on to you.” That is so very humbling. Many, many thanks, dear donors, first of all for your prayer support but also for your financial support.

To the board of trustees: we owe a hearty thank-you to you—ministers and elders from the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) and the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) who commit your precious time and energy so willingly and faithfully to the betterment of this worthy cause. Please continue to pray for us as well that we as faculty, staff, and students would not stray from or compromise the precious biblical doctrines of sovereign grace bequeathed to us but may remain faithful to our God to the end. In the last decade in particular, under able leadership, you have ramped up your knowledge of and involvement in the seminary and have been a huge help to me and to all of us in organizing and running it. And to our chairman, Dr. Jonathan Engelsma: we are going to grieve to see you relinquish your chairmanship this August as you complete the two allotted four-year terms. Thanks so much for your wisdom and help throughout these years.

Many thanks also to the ministers, elders, deacons, and members of the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) and the Free Reformed Churches (FRC) for your prayerful and financial support. I thank you for the strong church governance of PRTS as we co-labor for theological education of the church, *by* the church, and *for* the church denominationally and worldwide. I thank you as well for your respective seminary committees that shoulder the care of your denominational students: the Theological Seminary Committee of the HRC and the Theological Education Committee of the FRC. Your work is deeply appreciated.

And to our many volunteers: thanks so much for your invaluable service in the food bank and in countless other ways. This seminary would not be the same without you. “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Gal. 6:9). If not for the loving commitment of churches and individuals alike, giving of their time, talent, and treasure, much of what the Lord has allowed us to accomplish would not have happened.

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incredibly wise advice on all things educational, spiritual, and practical. Humble to a fault, he always had a huge servant's heart. He was the best teacher I have ever known. I sat in on nearly every course he taught for us. I also owe to him much of the little knowledge I have about serving as president of an institution like PRTS. Early on, he embraced then expanded my worldwide vision for PRTS, encouraging me to pursue full ATS accreditation for PRTS as well as to press on to offer PhD degrees. The second is my older brother, James Beeke, who has spent a lifetime in education—teaching at nearly every grade level himself, then becoming inspector of hundreds of schools in British Columbia on behalf of the government, and ultimately helping to start and administrate numerous English-speaking schools in China. The wisdom he has acquired, by God's grace, over these decades of educational experience has been a huge help to me. And his assistance in helping PRTS obtain ATS accreditation status has been invaluable. Never in all these years has he turned down my many requests for advice.

To all of you, please receive my heartfelt gratitude for your prayers, loyalty, and hard and able work during the past twenty-five years, for helping to establish and grow, by God's grace, an international Reformed seminary that, despite our and my shortcomings, promotes biblical, confessional, experiential, and practical ministry. Our prayer is that the day may yet come before Christ returns on the clouds that every city in the world will have at least one Reformed experiential preacher and congregation so that people will no longer have to grieve that they cannot find a solid Reformed church in their vicinity. I love you all and am grateful to all of you and pray that God may continue to use you and all of us for the furtherance of His kingdom here on earth in anticipation of His eternally perfect kingdom hereafter.

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—JRB



# **BIBLICAL STUDIES**

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## **The Age of the Spirit and Revival**

The night on which He was betrayed, Jesus spoke to His disciples about the dawn of a new day that would be heralded by the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in them (John 14:17). Jesus says in John 16:8, “When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”<sup>1</sup>

This new day is the period of time in which God the Holy Spirit dwells in believers and the church in the full measure of His divine person and in abundant demonstration of His divine power. Sent by the Father and poured out by the Son, the Spirit’s commission is to sanctify believers to be members of Christ, dwelling in them and applying to them what they already have in Christ, namely, the washing away of their sins, the daily renewing of their lives, and all the other benefits purchased for them by Christ’s redemptive sacrifice on the cross.

Ten days after Christ’s ascension to heaven, the Holy Spirit was poured out on the disciples gathered in Jerusalem on the feast day of Pentecost. Christ had prepared the apostles for what would happen to the church. So now, as the sound of a mighty, rushing wind filled the meeting place and tongues of fire appeared to hover over every head, believers knew that they were being filled with the Spirit. They began to speak in many languages “out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5).

The prophetic words of Christ were being fulfilled: the church was baptized with the Holy Spirit, and its members received power from on high. The age of the Spirit had begun! To understand this phenomenon, let us examine the age of the Spirit from three perspectives: the Spirit’s work in prior ages, the Spirit’s work in this present age, and the Spirit’s work particularly in revival.

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1. This article is the substance of an address given for the Philadelphia Conference of Reformed Theology (PCRT), 2010, in Sacramento, California, and Greenville, South Carolina.

### The Spirit's Work in Prior Ages

A superficial reading of the New Testament might lead some to conclude that the presence of the Spirit in the church and in the world was something new. The same mistake is often made regarding what Christ calls “the new covenant in my blood.” It is easy to separate the New Testament from the Old and conclude that a great gulf exists between the two. Some Christians speak of Pentecost as “the birthday of the church,” as if there were no visible church in the world prior to that time. Worse yet, some speak of the Jewish church of the Old Testament as something radically different from the Christian church of the New, as though each had nothing to do with the other.

That is simply not so, for the person and work of the Spirit are introduced to us already at the dawn of time. The earth was shrouded in darkness and a flood of great waters, but Moses tells us, in Genesis 1:2, “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The verb “moved upon” can be translated as “hovering” in the sense of shaking or fluttering, like a bird hovering over its nest. In fact, Deuteronomy 32:10–11 uses the same verb when it speaks of an eagle hovering over its young, tending to their every need. In His capacity as “Lord and Giver of Life,” the Spirit was fully present and active at the beginning to enact the astonishing results demanded by the various creative “fiats” of God. Psalm 104:30 says, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth.” In particular, the Spirit filled the earth, the seas, and the dry land with all kinds of living things. We may thus speak of the biosphere, or realm of life and living things that cover the earth, as the great creation of God the Holy Spirit (cf. Job 26:13).

In our creation, the Spirit was also present as the “Breath of Life,” or the breath of God that proceeded from the Father and the Son. When breathed into the nostrils of the divinely-sculpted but lifeless form of man, the Spirit transformed a creature of dust and earth into a living being (Gen. 2:7). Job 33:4 says, “The spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.” Thus we owe our life and the life of every other living thing as much to the power and creativity of the Holy Spirit as we do to the hand of our Maker and Father in heaven.

Man is a created being and therefore has no life in himself. He cannot beget himself, nor can he generate or sustain his development to maturity. He cannot keep himself alive or deliver himself from the power of death. For all this we must depend on the grace of God and, in particular, on the work of the Holy Spirit. When God withholds His grace, we decline and die; when He sends forth His life-giving Spirit, we and all living things are quickened again and flourish by the same power that gave us life at the beginning (Ps. 104:30).

So wherever there is life, the Holy Spirit is at work. David lived in a world pervaded by the omnipotent presence of the Holy Spirit, for he says in Psalm 139:7, “Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?” But the Spirit is more than power. As a person, He possesses the intelligence and the wisdom of God. As the source of “all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works,” He is at work in the minds and hearts of human beings everywhere. All valid insights into the nature of things, philosophical or scientific; all skills, whether manual, mechanical, or creative; all discoveries, inventions, or works of art; and everything that blesses the life of mankind reveal the presence and work of the Holy Spirit throughout history. The Spirit distributes gifts of statesmanship and craftsmanship that extend beyond man’s natural capacity. Consider the remarkable leadership skills He imparted to Joseph, which Pharaoh recognized (Gen. 41:38), and to Daniel, which the kings of Babylon acknowledged (Dan. 4:8–9, 5:11–14). Exodus 31:3–5 tells us that the Holy Spirit filled Bezaleel with knowledge and wisdom to do “all manner of workmanship” for constructing and furnishing the tabernacle. The Holy Spirit also provided some of the early kings of Israel with special capabilities (1 Sam. 16:13), spoke directly to prophets (Ezek. 2:2), and inspired the Old Testament Scriptures through a divine out-breathing and Spirit-bearing influence (2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:21). All these things are gifts of God, which are distributed among us by the work of the Holy Spirit. Without His light, human beings would produce anarchy and self-destruct and be condemned to utter darkness.

As the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit also labors in the world as the moral agent of God, “striving with man” to sustain whatever remains of the light of conscience, to restrain the destructive excesses of human depravity, and to mitigate the effects of the evil that people commit against one another. When we are overwhelmed by reports of the terrible things that humans do, we should consider how much worse it would be without the gracious work of the Spirit. His absence did not bode well for the people who lived in the world before the flood, whom God warned, “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Gen. 6:3). Withdrawing His Spirit from a man, a church, a nation, or the world is a sure sign of God’s hot displeasure.

It follows, then, that the Spirit so values the world that He does much more than create political entities and provide Israel with a theocracy. The Spirit also works progressively and cumulatively through historical redemptive revelation, both corporately and individually. Sinclair Ferguson writes, “Isaiah 63:7–14 clarifies this with its reflections on the Exodus, the great paradigmatic redemptive act of the Old Testament. (1) The Spirit is associated with the activity of Moses in working miracles (see Ex. 8:19).... He is the divine witness-bearer to

the redemptive activity of God (Isa. 63:11–12). (2) The Spirit leads and guides the people into the benediction of covenant fulfillment (Isa. 63:14)... (3) The Spirit is the executive of the Exodus-redemption wrought by God the Saviour (Isa. 63:8)."<sup>2</sup>

The Spirit has an essential role in the redemptive life of each individual believer. Knowing that true faith is worked in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who uses the Word of God as His chosen instrument, we can say that wherever prophecy and revelation exist and wherever the Word of God is received by faith, the Holy Spirit is at work. The fruit of the Spirit delineated in Galatians 5:22–23 was already manifest in Old Testament believers. Whether it be Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the heroes of faith, the martyrs of God, His servants, the prophets, or the believing remnant of the house of Israel, the work of the Holy Spirit was evident in what they believed and how they lived. David said the Holy Spirit was the treasure of his life. Fearing that he might lose this treasure, he earnestly prayed, "Take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

Where there is life, the Spirit is at work. Where there is light, the Spirit is at work. Wherever the might of human sin and evil is limited by divine providence, the Spirit strives with men. Where there is faith, the Spirit is at work in the hearts of men, fulfilling both individually and corporately a variety of goals in redemptive history that will lead to His fuller ministry in the Lord Jesus Christ and the present New Testament age.

### The Spirit's Work in This Present Age

If the Spirit has been present in the world from the beginning, and if He has done such powerful and important work since then, how is the present age any different? What is so new about the New Testament? Viewed in one light, the answer is: *nothing!* The promises of God are as old as the covenant of grace. The way of justification is the same under both testaments. The principles and laws of God's dealings with mankind remain the same. The purpose of God in exalting His Son and saving His people is unaltered.

But viewed in another light, the answer is: *everything!* When Christ entered the world to be "delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), the Spirit's presence was pervasive and powerful. The Spirit was present in the beginning of His incarnate existence (Luke 1:35), at His baptism (Mark 1:10), at His temptations in the wilderness (Mark 1:12), during His

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2. Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 24.

teaching (Luke 4:14), in His miracles (Matt. 12:28), throughout His emotional life (Luke 10:17, 21), and behind His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 8:11). But when Christ's Spirit was poured out on the church at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), the ground moved underfoot. Ferguson writes, "Pentecost publicly marks the transition from the old to the new covenant.... It is the threshold of the last days, and inaugurates the new era in which the eschatological life of the future invades the present evil age.... Thus, from the New Testament's standpoint, the 'fulfilment [or end] of the ages had dawned' on those who, through the gift of the Spirit, are 'in Christ' (1 Cor. 10:11). That which is 'new' in the new covenant ministry of the Spirit is therefore inextricably related to the significance of the Pentecost event."<sup>3</sup> What was a promise now is fulfilled. What was a hope, expressed in "types and shadows," now is revealed as a body of substance and a new reality for us to enter and take hold of by faith. What was so long hidden, unknown, and unacknowledged is now revealed and proclaimed to the ends of the earth. What for so long was the privilege of a few blessed souls is now offered to whoever believes on the name of the only begotten Son of God. The outpouring of the Spirit ushers in a new era of character and nature as well as of scope or magnitude.

In this new age, the Spirit continues to do all His great works but in more profound ways and on a much larger scale. As the Spirit of Christ, He affects many more people with a more definite focus. The light showers of the pre-Pentecostal Spirit are transformed into the heavy showers of the post-Pentecostal Spirit, bringing about the conversion of millions over the centuries.

Having sustained the bodily life of man for so long, the Holy Spirit now more abundantly works inwardly in human hearts that were dead in trespasses and sins. His first work in this age of the gospel is to quicken the souls of the elect and prepare the soil of their hearts to receive the good seed of the Word of Christ.

The Spirit who for so many ages worked with man to restrain human sin and evil now bombards the consciences of men with convicting power. He crushes resistance to the gospel, puts to flight the lies and errors of the devil, overthrows the citadels of unbelief, and provides the way for the gospel to do its work as the power of God in saving all who savingly believe.

What amazing multitasking the Spirit does in the elect in uniting them to Christ and working out within them the order of salvation! Consider only some of A. W. Pink's chapter titles in his book on the Holy Spirit: the Spirit

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3. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 57-58.

regenerates, quickens, enlightens, convicts, comforts, draws, works faith, unites to Christ, indwells, teaches, cleanses, leads, assures, witnesses, seals, assists, intercedes, transforms, preserves, confirms, fructifies, and endows (chaps. 10–31). We ought to appreciate and treasure the Spirit’s ministry within us far more than we are prone to do!

Moreover, the Spirit, who for so long has distributed the gifts of God to mankind in general, now takes special care to distribute the gifts of Christ among all the members of His body, the church. He furnishes the church with ministers, elders, and deacons; empowers the means of grace; and equips the people of God to minister to one another and to the needs of a hurting, broken world in the name of Christ. He blesses the witness of the church and extends the mission of the church to every part of the world.

For so long the Spirit worked in hidden ways among a chosen few; now He openly demonstrates His power, working powerfully in the lives of many and helping the church to grow as a kingdom of faith and love and holiness that one day will fill the earth. He does all this in the name of Christ—on His behalf, for His glory.

The Spirit inspires joy, peace, righteousness, and the witness of the love of God in our hearts. He labors among the followers of Christ with the joy and abandon of a deer set free. It is as if the Spirit consented so long to work in a limited way in obedience to the Father and the Son but now has that limitation removed. By Christ and under the gospel (particularly when Christ Himself is being gloriously preached), the Spirit now pours Himself out in all His fullness, unleashing His light, His power, His gifts, and His love for the people of God. Truly the age of Christ, the age of the gospel, is the age of the Spirit. And that age is inseparable from revival.

### **The Spirit’s Work in Revival**

The Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost resulted in massive revival. The age of the Spirit is the age of revivals. That raises several critical questions:

*What is revival?*

Iain Murray points out that, among evangelicals today, there are three different views of what revival is. The first view prefers to speak of *renewal* or *continual revival* rather than special seasons of revival. Murray explains: “Revival, they say, is not to be thought of as an extraordinary event which occurs occasionally and periodically, rather it is something which is of the permanent essence of

the New Testament age.”<sup>4</sup> It is “Pentecost, once and for all.”<sup>5</sup> This view, Murray points out, is often promoted in the Dutch Reformed tradition, even by great thinkers like Abraham Kuyper.<sup>6</sup>

The second view regards revival as *conditional upon obedience*. Murray subdivides this view into two groups. First are those “who believe that revival can be secured by intense and prayerful evangelistic effort.”<sup>7</sup> They regard a revival “as being virtually the same thing as a period of energetic evangelistic activity.”<sup>8</sup> The trailblazer here is Charles G. Finney (1792–1875) who claimed that revival can be identified with certain phenomena that could be produced at any time through the correct use of the right means. According to this view, man can instigate revival; supernatural intervention is not essential. That’s why a revivalist could come to my home city of Grand Rapids recently, pictured with a briefcase in hand, with the promise attached that he carries revival with him in his briefcase! Second, and more commonly, are those who stress that repentance and renewed personal holiness are the means that produce revival. Advocates of this view, like Jonathan Goforth and Duncan Campbell, are fond of quoting 2 Chronicles 7:14. They stress that if Christians would only exercise the graces of repentance, submission, consecration, and obedience, revival would automatically follow. Campbell writes, “A full and complete surrender is the place of blessing, but that also is the price of revival.”<sup>9</sup>

The third view teaches that revival is the sovereign outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of sinners in a greater measure than is normally the case. Authentic revivals are not miraculously different from the regular experience of the church. The difference is in degree, not in kind. In an “outpouring of the Spirit,” great numbers of people are born again and grow in spiritual maturity in greater measure than usual. Spiritual influence is more widespread, conviction of sin deeper, feelings more intense, the sense of God more overwhelming,

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4. Iain Murray, “The Necessary Ingredients of a Biblical Revival,” *Banner of Truth*, no. 184 (Jan. 1979): 20; cf. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors; Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences, 1959–1978* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 368.

5. Iain Murray, *Pentecost Today? The Biblical Basis for Understanding Revival* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 7.

6. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 127.

7. Murray, *Pentecost Today?*, 8.

8. Murray, “The Necessary Ingredients of a Biblical Revival,” 184.

9. Duncan Campbell, *The Price and Power of Revival* (London: Scripture Illustrations, 1956), 30, 53–54, cited in Murray, *Pentecost Today?*, 9.

and love for God and others stronger. All this heightens normal Christianity rather than changes it.<sup>10</sup>

This view teaches that revivals may be accompanied by unscriptural abuses, bizarre phenomena, and spurious conversions, for along with a surge of wheat is a surge of chaff. Hence a winnowing season usually follows revival.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the Spirit of God plays a great and mighty role in authentic revival. And that work is primarily done through preaching that is honored by the Spirit.

This “old-school view,” as Murray calls it, views revival as a special, magnificent work of the Holy Spirit. That differs substantially from the first view that does not expect anything unusual in renewal or revival and from the second view that sees little need for supernatural intervention. A diligent study of the book of Acts certainly upholds the old-school view as the most biblical. This view was taught by John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, William B. Sprague, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer, Iain Murray, and scores of other sound theologians from the Reformation until today.<sup>12</sup>

*How is genuine revival distinguished from false revival?*

Does Scripture give us marks by which we may test the authenticity of revivals? I believe it does, particularly in the early chapters of Acts, which tell about the New Testament church in the midst of its first major, authentic revival. Peter’s sermon in Acts 2 describes some of the marks that accompany true revival, confirming that what is poured out on the church is from the Holy Spirit, not some man-made spirit. Let us consider, first, a brief summary of Peter’s sermon, then look at several marks Acts 2 offers about authentic revival.

*What did Peter convey in his Spirit-anointed sermon?*

The New Testament church of 120 believers was multiplied many times over in one day under the preaching of the apostles, of which Peter’s sermon serves as an outline. Of the 3,000 who were added to the church, there is no indication of many false conversions, for verse 42 says the new converts continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. By conservative estimates, the New Testament church grew from 120 to 20,000 believers in Jerusalem, from Pentecost to the persecution following Stephen’s death (Acts 8). If Peter’s sermon was typical of apostolic preaching, we should

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10. Iain Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750–1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 23.

11. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 82–85.

12. Murray, “The Necessary Ingredients of a Biblical Revival,” 20.



see what it teaches us about preaching and revival during New Testament times as well as today.

In his sermon on Pentecost, Peter rises to vindicate God and his fellow believers and to proclaim the gospel of Christ Jesus. In Acts 2:17–20, he interprets the events of Pentecost in light of the prophecy of Joel 2:28–32, which is now being fulfilled in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on multitudes of sinners, both Jews and Gentiles. In verse 21, Peter says, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Peter then connects the gift of the Holy Spirit with the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sketches the character and life of his Master, speaking of Christ’s humanity (v. 22a); His miracles, wonders, and signs (v. 22b); and His crucifixion according to God’s plan (v. 23). He then astonishes his audience by testifying that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead (vv. 24–32).

The crowd is amazed as Peter supports his assertion that Jesus has risen from the dead by referring to Psalm 16:8–11, a prophecy all would admit was Messianic, because, though it was written by David, it could not refer to David, for it speaks of descending into the grave and rising from the dead before the body saw corruption. Peter then argues that David did die and saw physical corruption, for his sepulcher is with us to this day. Therefore David could not be speaking about himself but was foreseeing that the Messiah would sit upon his throne. That prophecy was verified in Jesus of Nazareth, Peter says, who rose from the dead, and the apostles are witnesses of His resurrection.

In verse 33, Peter talks about the ascension of Christ and His sitting at the right hand of the Father. He then declares the outpouring of the Holy Spirit from heaven by the Son of God. Peter affirms that because Christ has now ascended into heaven to pour out His Holy Spirit, He is now doing so in the midst of all those gathered at Pentecost.

Peter goes on to say that listeners should not be surprised that he speaks of Christ’s ascension, for David also prophesied of it in Psalm 110, saying, “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” The psalmist could not be referring to himself in this prophecy because he had not yet ascended into the heavens. He could only be speaking of Jesus, who was exalted by the right hand of God and is now — notwithstanding their crucifixion of Him — both Lord and Christ.

Peter’s exposition of a humiliated and exalted Redeemer bears astonishing fruit by the powerful ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thousands of listeners are convicted that they have sentenced to death the Messiah of whom the prophets spoke. They cry out in response to the sermon, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (v. 37).

That provides Peter with a wonderful opportunity to press home his exhortation in verses 38–40. He preaches the gospel boldly, bidding his listeners to repent and be converted. He urges them to publicly declare themselves disciples of Christ by being baptized in His name. God has wounded them so that He might heal them, Peter says. His promise is for them and their children. Peter urges his listeners onward to repentance, baptism, the name of Christ, the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promises of God, covenant faithfulness, election, the need for salvation, and whatever else he addresses in “many other words” (v. 40). He confronts their consciences. And the Holy Spirit blesses his sermon by bringing three thousand people to conversion. Such is the fruit of the first Christian sermon preached after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the New Testament church’s first revival.

*What are some important marks of revival according to Acts 2?*

Let us now look at some of the marks of revival and lessons we can learn about revival from this history.

First, *authentic revival is always a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit*. The existence, depth, timing, and numbers of revival are all determined by God. Revivals are divinely-appointed and God-sent; they occur at the time of God’s choosing. Acts 2:24 says, “The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” And Acts 13:48 says, “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

Authentic revival cannot be planned or manufactured by man. A revival is not the result of certain processes in history; it cannot be produced by human zeal or endeavor. It is, rather, a rending of the heavens, a divine intervention among the affairs of men. Authentic revival is prompted by the same sovereign, mysterious influences of the Holy Spirit that belong to the supernaturalism of the New Testament. How else can we explain why three thousand people were converted in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, not in Athens or Rome, or why one preacher was greatly used in one place and not in another? In authentic revivals, the vast and sudden spreading of the gospel follows no observable plan or pattern. With respect to time, place, and instrumentality, all attempts to account for authentic revival in mere human terms break down.

Said another way, *revivals are independent of human support or human sympathy*. Jesus says about the work of God’s Spirit, “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth” (John 3:8). Because of its sovereign, sudden, wind-like character, revival almost invariably confounds human calculations. It is not anticipated even by the most zealous believer. It is God coming into the midst

of His people in such a way that human plans are confounded and men are humbled in the dust. It is accompanied by an all-pervasive consciousness that God has come among His people. By the Spirit's irresistible power, the most improbable events take place. Israel is withered like a valley of dry bones, and Israel is brought out of Babylon as out of their graves. On the day of Pentecost, the men who crucified Jesus Christ are brought into His church. In the sixteenth century, former Roman Catholic leaders such as Luther and Calvin become the very leaders of revival in the church. God does not always do what men expect. And men cannot hinder what God sovereignly works by His decree. A revival is the sovereign work of God.

What a contrast to massive, evangelistic, man-made campaign revivals! Such campaigns are spurious revivals. They represent man-made *revivalism*. They are not dependent on the sovereignty of the Spirit but on man's devices: psychological prayer, the personality of the revivalist, predictions of impending results, emotional preaching, and other gimmicks that make revivalism predictable. That is why promoters of revivalism can boldly announce beforehand when revivals will take place.

Second, *authentic revival is usually, though not always, preceded by a remarkable effusion of prayer*. As in Acts 2 and throughout church history, revivals have often been prompted, under the Spirit's tutelage, by a felt need for prayer, which in turn prompts prayer meetings that are the seeds of revivals. As James says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (5:16).

The last great revival in the United States began in New York City in 1857. Often referred to as the Third Great Awakening, this movement began with a prayer meeting of six people and concluded the following year with approximately fifty thousand conversions in New York City and two hundred thousand across the Northeast. Prayer was the Spirit's means to germinate the seed of revival. As Matthew Henry said, "When God designs mercy, He stirs up prayer." And William Gurnall wrote, "The cocks crow thickest toward the break of day."<sup>13</sup>

This was true at Pentecost as well, for the meeting began with 120 people gathering regularly to pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Note that the New Testament believers did not minimize prayer because revival was promised but because the promises of God roused them to more prayer. They acted like a child who has received a promise from her father to get her something she desires. So she meets her father every day when he arrives home from work, asking, "Daddy, did you get it yet?" As true children of God, these believers

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13. Willaim Gurnall, *The Christian in Compleat Armour* (London, 1669), 405.

waited and prayed, beseeching the Lord to fulfill His promise that they might receive the Holy Spirit according to His Word.

This attitude is sorely needed today as well. Are we pleading for God to send revival to fulfill His promises? Pentecost was a sovereign act of God, but it was preceded by a spirit of prayer and supplication. God is sovereignly pleased to tie together revival and means, especially the means of prayer.

Could lack of prayer be the reason, humanly speaking, why we have witnessed so little revival in the past 160 years? Is our half-hearted prayer a significant part of the problem? We have too easily become accustomed to living without revival and without conversions. When George Whitefield did not hear of any conversions for two weeks under his ministry, he would write in his diary, "Lord, what's wrong?"

Third, *revival usually begins in the church with the reawakening and enlightening of those who have already been born again.* The small group of disciples who were already enlightened were blessed with the Spirit's outpouring, and through them thousands were converted. When we storm the throne of grace for revival, we may mean well, but even believers are prone to think of other people more than ourselves. We are prone to forget that authentic revival necessitates that we forsake our backsliding ways, be filled with fresh love for God, then be willing to be used as clay in God's hands for the welfare of others. As William Taylor wrote, "To have the world converted, we must have the Church purified and ennobled, through the enjoyment of a rich effusion of the Holy Ghost."<sup>14</sup> Revival is a special season of heart-searching when many believers simultaneously experience conviction and renunciation of sin, culminating in a renewal of their dedication to the Lord.

Believers should be ashamed that personal revival is even necessary. By confessing our sins, appropriating by faith our riches in Christ, obeying God's will, and renouncing evil on a daily basis, we could have the highest joy, the deepest peace, and the fullest measure of God's power every day of our lives. Daily life in Christ can be ours in a victorious life of faith, despite our battles with indwelling sin. The problem is that most believers live on a sub-standard level. We leave our first love. We grow spiritually cold. We become powerless. We lose sight of what is eternal and become enamored with the earthly and temporal. God Himself must revive us with childlike faith, heartfelt repentance, unswerving obedience, and loving service. In revival, God uses His means to powerfully bring His children back to what ought to be a daily Christian walk.

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14. William Taylor, *Peter, the Apostle* (New York: Harper, 1876), 182.

The church's recovery of truth has been compared to a sunrise in a mountainous region. First, the sun shines on the tops of the mountains; then, as the day proceeds, it reaches down into the valleys. So recovery of truth often shines upon the lives of a few leaders; then, through their influence being blessed by the Spirit, it reaches down to the pew. So on Pentecost and in subsequent weeks, God blessed 120 believers and used them to be a blessing for tens of thousands.

Fourth, in authentic revival, *remarkable spiritual growth results from the Spirit joining Himself to the Word of God*. Notice how Peter's sermon conveys his astonishing spiritual growth. What progress he has made in fifty-three days since his Master's death! What a contrast there is between this sermon and what he said prior to Christ's death!

Much of Peter's growth is no doubt due to the extraordinary teaching of Jesus during the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. But even more of this growth can be attributed to the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit, which has just filled Peter. Christ had promised the disciples that the Comforter would bring all things to their remembrance and teach them all things and guide them into all truth. These promises are obviously being fulfilled in Peter's sermon. Twelve of twenty-two verses are quotations from the Psalms and the Prophets. Peter experienced what all believers experience in times of the Spirit's enlightenment: *the Spirit bears witness to the Word*. Scripture testifies, "He sent his word, and healed them" (Ps. 107:20).

The conclusion is obvious: We do not need man-centered gimmicks to produce revival; we need the Word of truth and the Spirit of truth working together. Peter began his sermon with the Word and ended with the Word. Everything he said was biblical. In true preaching, law and gospel are the substance; the Word of God, the instrument; the Spirit of God, the power; the salvation of God, the result; and the glory of God, the end.

Did you notice how Christ-centered Peter's preaching is? Revival preaching is preaching of the Lord Jesus. In revival preaching, fallow ground must be broken up, the law must be proclaimed, and the tragedy of our fall in Adam must be exposed. The necessity of regeneration must be clearly taught, and people must be commanded to repent and believe the gospel, but the heart of all revival preaching is the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessed message of redemption. No other name but Christ has the power to set men free. Let us pray, "Oh, Holy Spirit, we beseech Thee, open our eyes that we may see the face of Christ reflected in every Scripture! Help us to see Him as in a mirror, now darkly, but one day face-to-face!

Note, too, that Peter preaches the whole counsel of God. He preaches Christ's death and resurrection for lost sinners through forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. He calls for faith and repentance, based on the testimony of the prophets and the apostles. We must never shortchange the biblical gospel by preaching the New Testament without the Old, by proclaiming the cross without the resurrection, by offering forgiveness without the Spirit, or by calling for faith without repentance. Authentic revival is inseparable from a faithful proclamation of the whole counsel of God revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.

The church of God depends on the Word that the Holy Spirit has put into its hand and heart. Truth leads the way to the church's restoration and revival. In revival, people are made willing to live and die for the truth. Do you search the Word and love the truth? Do you strive, in dependency on the Spirit, to live that truth?

Fifth, Spirit-worked revival is honest with the souls of men, for *the call to repentance must be coupled with the rediscovery of truth*. Church history affirms that God uses preaching that is honest and upright and aims to bring the whole counsel of God's Word to the whole man. This sort of preaching aims for the conscience, demands repentance, and exalts the grace and glory of God. God used such preaching on Pentecost. Peter did not mince any words; he aimed for the conviction of sin. He urged his hearers, "Repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38).

Peter used the most important and strongest Greek word for repentance, *metanoia*, meaning to radically change one's mind, to unconditionally return to God, and to do an about-face in the direction of one's life. It means to sorrow over sin, to confess and forsake it, and to cast oneself upon the mercy of God. It means to turn from a self-centered life to a God-centered life. Repentance is both a divine gift and a lifelong commitment.

Peter did not flatter his listeners. He had no soft words for sin. He preached what his hearers were, which was far from what they ought to be. As he preached, he did not flinch as he had before the maidservant prior to Jesus's trial. By the Spirit's grace, Peter was true to his name: he was a rock. He was filled with the Spirit and therefore preached the truth with confidence, authority, and sympathy. He preached faithfully, earnestly, clearly, personally, and powerfully—so powerfully that hell itself trembled. The Spirit opened Peter's mouth so that he lost all fear of people, including those who mocked him. Peter was not fearless prior to the indwelling of the Spirit. He feared drowning in Matthew 14. He feared mockery and feared telling the truth to a servant in John 18. But now Peter did not hesitate to say more than once to his hearers that they had crucified the

Messiah. He said in verse 23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," and in verse 36, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." The religious leaders of his day could not contradict such truth, and the crowd of listeners was amazed.

Pentecost was a turning point in Peter's life. As the Spirit poured into him, the apostle grew. Previously, he had been a mixture of cowardice and confidence, of good impulses and great mistakes. But now, under the Spirit's augmented control, Peter was strong, sober-minded, and courageous. Even the crowd was bewildered at his speech, not just by the phenomena of speaking in other tongues but because of Peter's clear explanation of what Pentecost meant, which, in turn, prompted massive repentance.

Are you also a recipient of Spirit-worked repentance, or are you still an impenitent unbeliever? My friend, we have all slain the Lord of glory with our wicked hands. Peter's listeners did it literally; we have done it spiritually. By nature, we all have the blood of Jesus on our hands. So Peter's message still comes to every unbeliever today: Repent, for you have crucified the Lord of glory.

Finally, *Spirit-worked revival is always accompanied by saving faith*. This is abundantly illustrated on Pentecost (Acts 2:41, 44), in the church's growth in the early chapters of Acts, and throughout the history of revival. Wherever we turn in Scripture, God's people triumph whenever they are given great exploits. They triumph because they believe the promises of God revealed in the gospel. Hebrews 11:33 tells us, "Faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."

Our attitude to revival must not be passive or faint. We must storm the mercy seat, pleading God's promises, and trusting Him who is able to fill the earth with the knowledge of Himself. In the weeks after Pentecost, when the apostles were persecuted and forbidden to preach the name of Christ, they went forward by faith. Let us pray much for the power of faith that lays hold of the promises of God in prayer.

John Bunyan beautifully illustrates this in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, when Christian and Hopeful fall asleep on the grounds of Giant Despair and are taken in chains into Doubting Castle. In that miserable hole, they are terrified by the Giant as he shows them the bones of various pilgrims he has smashed and broken in pieces. "So it shall be with you," he says. Christian and Hopeful are terrified, Bunyan says, until Saturday night, when they begin to pray. They continue to pray through the night. Finally, at dawn, Christian suddenly stands

up and says to Hopeful, "What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty? I have a key in my bosom, called *Promise*, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in *Doubting-Castle*. Then said *Hopeful*, That's good news, good brother, pluck it out of thy bosom and try."<sup>15</sup>

And so they did. Prayer, which preceded the promise, enabled them to take hold of the promise, so that, almost before they knew it, the pilgrims were loosed from their chains and brought through the grim doors of the castle to freedom.

So it is with the church. We are helpless and bereft of strength, but God has commanded us to pray in faith. He has told us that we shall not seek His face in vain. When the church truly prays, it is clothed with the Spirit's fire from heaven.

### Conclusions: Assets or Hindrances to Revival

Are you an asset or hindrance to the age of the Spirit, the age of revival?

- ✦ We are hindrances when we are satisfied with mere *tradition*. Tradition can be valuable if it is grounded on Scripture. But if we are satisfied with mere tradition while lacking the life and power of godliness, we are a hindrance to revival. Do we read our Bibles, pray, and attend church as mere form or tradition? Do we use Christianity only to quiet our consciences? Are we content to believe the truth with our mind and let the world walk by our door, traveling onward to hell, without so much as a prayer to God for their repentance? Do we ever evangelize others? Are we filled with grave concern for their salvation? If not, we are a hindrance to revival.
- ✦ We are hindrances when we fail to be *intercessors* for the eternal well-being of others. How self-centered our prayers can be! We so often pray selfishly, seeking to use God in our prayers rather than letting prayer change us. James 4:3 says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." What obstacles we are to revival when we essentially ask that our will be done rather than God's will! How shameful we are in failing to ask that God's name be hallowed, for His kingdom to come, for His will to be done, and for souls to be saved. Do we ever take the kingdom of heaven by violence as we wrestle for the Spirit's awakening and reviving work in the lives of others?
- ✦ We are hindrances to revival because of our cursed *unbelief*. Few people realize how serious an enemy unbelief is and how contrary it is to revival.

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15. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), 134.



In my years of ministry, I can only recall one man crying out with tears, "Oh, my cursed, cursed unbelief!" I will never forget the impression that made upon me. I fear that many of us use unbelief to shield ourselves from our responsibility to enter into "soul travail" for revival. We are reticent to see unbelief as the monster that it is. We confess with our mouths that unbelief is the mother of all iniquity, but we do not believe that in our hearts. Because of our unbelief we do not expect God to do much. That is why we are content with a small measure of the Spirit and His work, with a trickle of conversions, and with lukewarm faith.

Do you really believe that God can save sinners and that He delights to do so? James W. Alexander wrote, "Unbelief as to the power and willingness of God to [grant revival] is at the bottom of all our neglect and wrong action.... An awakening which should shake the dry bones in all the lowest populations, rousing them from filth and drunkenness, and raising up an exceeding great army to fight the good fight of faith, is more than we dare ask of God. And yet, it is not more than we may reasonably expect on Scriptural grounds, nor more than the eyes of the Church shall joyfully see, in the day when, by the Spirit, [the church] shall rise to the height of faith and entreaty."<sup>16</sup>

Do we ever rise to "the height of faith and entreaty"? Do we truly believe that God is able and willing to work a great revival in the world today? Let us expect great things from a great God, as John Newton wrote:

Thou art coming to a King,  
Large petitions with thee bring;  
For His grace and power are such,  
None can ever ask too much.

Should we expect another Pentecost? Numbers are not the point, friends. The point is: Do we believe in God? Do we believe the Holy Spirit can do a mighty work? We must not tell God what to do, but we must storm the mercy seat, crying out with the prophet Habakkuk, "O LORD, revive thy work.... In wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2). Let us not leave the Lord alone but cry out, "O God, glorify Thy Name! Save sinners! Revive Thy church! Is not Thy name, Thy cause, Thy glory at stake? Make a name for Thyself in me, among us, and throughout the world, for Thine own glory! Begin with me, Lord! *Revive me!* And let me be used for many others. Open the windows of heaven, and come down with revival blessings!"

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16. James W. Alexander, *Revival and Its Lessons* (New York: American Tract Society, 1858), 10.

James W. Alexander asked his readers in the midst of the 1857 New York revival:

- ✦ Are you an enemy of revival?
- ✦ Do you rejoice in revival?
- ✦ Are you a subject of revival?
- ✦ Do you pray for revival?
- ✦ Are you helping forward revival?
- ✦ Does your heart care for the fruits of revival?
- ✦ Have you sought to honor God in revival?<sup>17</sup>

Do your faith and life show that you are living in the age of the Spirit, an age of potential revival?

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17. Alexander, *Revival and Its Lessons*, 1–11 [2].