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Inside This Issue

- **Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics (7) Romans 1:18-21 (cont.)**
Paul S. Nelson
Front Page
- **Baptist Doctrines and Distinctives: Part 7 Notable Pre-Reformation British Baptists and Churches**
James A. Billings
page 2
- **Walking with the Lord**
Mark A. Bailon
page 4
- **Studies on Revival of Religion: Part 3**
William R. Downing
page 6
- **Further Thoughts on Revival**
William R. Downing
page 7
- **Images from Church History**
page 8



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Essential Texts for a Biblical Approach to Apologetics (7) Romans 1:18-21 (cont.)

By P. S. Nelson

Romans 1:18-21 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

In our last article,¹ under the subheading *Natural Revelation and Apologetics* we dealt with *A Conflict of Worldviews*. We continue under the same subheading, drawing apologetic principles from our text, Rom. 1:18-21. This article addresses *The Myth of Neutrality*.

The Myth of Neutrality

Being formally trained as a scientist, I have been taught to be objective in the evaluation of evidence. I have been taught to let the evidence speak for itself. The scientist must approach the evidence from a position of neutrality. I soon discovered that facts do not speak for themselves, they must be interpreted. Although the facts are the same to both Christian and non-Christian alike, the interpretation of facts greatly differ because interpretation is dependent upon one's presuppositions. Therefore neutrality is a myth. All men have their presuppositions, none are neutral.² In apologetics, this is especially critical for the right interpretation of biblical, historical,

archeological and scientific fact.

All reasoning is presuppositional whether one is a Christian or not. Both Christians and non-Christians use presuppositions to determine what they will accept as truth and reality. Each possesses a worldview made up of presuppositions about reality, epistemology and ethics.³ Because of this, every man has an inherent pre-condition for interpreting facts. There is no neutral approach to facts, for facts must be interpreted by one's worldview. To assert a neutral position is nothing but a pretense.

In a previous article dealing with the noetic effects of sin⁴ and based upon an exegesis of Romans 1:21, we concluded that "natural man is incapable of reasoning objectively without bias against God." Intellectual neutrality is impossible because of the depravity of the unbeliever's mind, therefore, man will not reason in a way that is subject to the authority of God's revelation. The presuppositions of the unbeliever's worldview are in rebellion against God. Their fallacious epistemology would do away with God in every respect. The unbeliever's claim to neutrality is but a ploy to free him of the inescapable knowledge of God described in Romans 1. It is what the Apostle Paul calls "vain reasoning" (Rom. 1:21) and is nothing more than a camouflaged hostility. His delusion of neutrality in using the scientific method is an attempt to eliminate God as Creator.

Let us consider, in general, the unbelievers' philosophy of fact. The natural man's "philosophy of fact" assumes that the facts he observes and studies are not created by God. He believes that factuality is independent of God; that he can understand facts totally apart from God. He necessarily will operate on two principles; that facts exist as brute facts, and that he is the ultimate interpreter of them. Man's

autonomy reigns supreme. He is the final point of reference when it comes to the interpretation of facts. It is man's attempt to be his own god and interpreter. When the unbeliever demands neutrality, he reveals that he is in a state of self-deception. He is actually suppressing the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

The believer's "philosophy of fact" is exactly the opposite. To the Christian, all facts are God-given facts. All facts are pre-interpreted by God, created by God, and revelatory of God.⁵ Thus man is confronted by his Creator in every fact. There is no fact that has meaning apart from being created by God. And if all facts are created facts then no facts are neutral in their witness to the Creator.⁶ Therefore the relationship of facts to the Creator is critical to one's apologetic method.

Is it morally right for a Christian to approach the unbeliever on a neutral basis? I think not. The world's view of neutrality is based upon the presuppositions of an unregenerate mindset. To accept their epistemological principles of neutrality is to relinquish the authority of God's Word and subject ourselves to human autonomy. Neutrality toward God is in effect negation of God.⁷ The believer must never take a neutral stance in order to win the unbeliever. He gives up everything at precisely this point, and especially that which is ultimate; the Word of God.

1 Peter 3:15 commands the apologist to "sanctify Christ as Lord in the heart."⁸ The Christian apologist is committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This means that apologetics is not neutral; Christ's authority, and that of his Word, is presupposed. We are to bow to the Lordship of Christ in every area of life, and that includes the entire world of thought, and especially apologetics. This is our starting point, Christ and his Word. The Christian is obligated to presuppose the Word of Christ in every area of knowledge. For God demands an unreserved allegiance to the Lordship of Christ.

When a Christian gives up the authority of the Word of God in order to be neutral in reasoning with the unbeliever, he acts as a deist. A deist believes in the existence of God purely on rationalistic grounds without any reliance of

the authority of revelation. To the deist, man's ability to reason is held as ultimate, and thus he begins to autonomously interpret facts he observes from his rationalistic point of view. He would not dare to use Scripture as an authority to interpret any fact. On the other hand, the Christian theist believes in God based upon the authority of his self-attesting revelation. Are we deists or theists?

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¹ Nelson, Paul S., *PIRSpective*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, (2009).

² Bahnsen, G., *Always Ready* (Texarkana, TX: Covenant Media Foundation, 1996), p.13.

³ Nelson, Paul S., *PIRSpective*, Vol. 2, Issue 2 (2009).

⁴ Nelson, Paul S., *PIRSpective*, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2009).

⁵ Bahnsen, G., *Presuppositional Apologetics* (Powder Springs, GA: The American Vision, 2008), p. 90.

⁶ Rushdoony, R.J., *By What Standard* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 1995), p. 127.

⁷ Van Til, C., *The Defense of the Faith* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008, 4th Edition), p. 294.

⁸ Although the KJV reads "the Lord God," in the original Gk. the better rendering from the most reliable manuscripts is "Christ as Lord."

Baptist Doctrines and Distinctives: Part 7 Notable Pre-Reformation British Baptists and Churches

By J. A. Billings

Introduction

The modern theory held among the prominent Baptist scholars of our generation is that there were no baptisms by immersion, hence, no Baptists in England prior to 1641. This unorthodox theory was originally posited by William H. Whitsitt. Whitsitt was Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1893 he published some articles in *Johnson's New Encyclopedia* alleging that New Testament believers only sprinkled or poured prior to 1641. He proposed that the Baptists, as they are known today, were a hybrid of the Reformation who emerged by way of the English Separatist Movement.

Whitsitt's heretical position basically

stated that there was not a witness of New Testament Christianity throughout the Dark Ages. This caused great infighting among the Southern Baptists of his day. At the beginning of the controversy, in 1895, the Seminary Trustees of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary elected Whitsitt president of the Seminary with the hopes of calming the infighting. Their decision to make Whitsitt the President seems to betray their bias for Whitsitt's new perspective on Baptist history. In 1899 the controversy was at a fever pitch and Whitsitt resigned.

There is no disagreement that Whitsitt was a brilliant scholar. Yet he purposely went on record denouncing the true historical record concerning the antiquity of the Baptists. The following prominent Baptist historians and scholars are all on record as being at odds with the position of Whitsitt: Isaac Backus, Thomas Crosby, Joseph Ivimey, Thomas Armitage, David Benedict, B.H. Carroll, John T. Christian, J.P. Boyce and J. R. Graves.

Ironically, in our day the most notable Baptist scholars and historians are in agreement with Whitsitt's wayward notion of Baptist history, Baptist doctrines and Baptist distinctives. Confederate with Whitsitt are renowned Baptist historians and scholars Drs. Michael A. G. Haykin, Leon McBeth, Tom Nettles and James Renihan.¹ Whitsitt was rightfully condemned for his anarchic views by the most renowned Baptists of his time. The question as to why our current scholars have sided with the eccentric positions of this man and, as a result, denounced their eminent predecessors is a question that must remain unanswered for the time being.

A Brief History of Christianity in England

Christians had come to England as early as the middle of the first century (62 A.D.). From that time onward the light of the Gospel glowed on the Isles of Great Britain. The Glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ shined on the throne of King Lucius (180 A.D.) and he was converted. He was the first king of England to receive Believer's Baptism by Immersion. Through the witness and testimony of the Gospel of Grace, he

and many of his subjects were baptized upon a profession of their faith in Jesus Christ.²

The doctrine of Believer's Baptism by Immersion was held firmly by the English at least until 600 A.D. Jonathan Davis, in his *History of the Welsh Baptists* (1835) states "*Infant baptism was in vogue long before this time in many parts of the world, but not in Britain. The ordinances of the Gospel were then administered exclusively there, according to the primitive mode. Baptism by immersion, administered to those who professed repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Welsh Christians considered the only baptism of the New Testament. That was the unanimous sentiment as a nation, from the time that the Christian religion was embraced by them in 62, until a considerable time after 600.*"³

St. Patrick of Ireland was a Baptist Missionary

St. Patrick (387–461 A.D.) was a Baptist missionary who preached for 40 years among the Irish, Scots, and English. His doctrine was decidedly that of New Testament doctrine and practice. He preached salvation by grace through faith alone. He held to the Lord's Supper and believer's baptism by immersion as the only two New Testament ordinances. He held to the simplicity of the New Testament pattern of church government and practice. It is estimated that he baptized by immersion 12,000 converts and established 365 churches.⁴ The Roman Church has re-written history and made this great Baptist missionary a Romish saint. The record reveals that Roman Catholicism did not make inroads to Britain until Pope Gregory the Great sent Austin in 597 A.D. which was 136 years after Patrick's death. Romanism did not become the official religion of Britain until 644 A.D.

John Wycliffe

John Wycliffe, the "Morning Star of the Reformation" (1319–1384) was a Baptist by conviction. Wycliffe was a scholar at Oxford who was converted through the preaching of Thomas Bradwardine, Archbishop of Canterbury. The changes in Wycliffe's

doctrine were gradual over the years until he embraced the scriptures as the only rule for faith and practice. Wycliffe truly was the father of the Reformation; he had no predecessor except the forgotten millions of martyrs who had shed their blood because they would not forsake their Lord. These martyrs are the unsung heroes of the witness and testimony of New Testament Christianity during the Dark Ages. Wycliffe believed, preached and trained men to preach the Gospel. The major doctrines he held were Justification by Faith Alone, the Authority of Scripture, the Sovereignty of God, the Doctrines of Grace (denied the doctrines of Pelagius), and he believed in only two church ordinances, The Lord's Supper and Believer's Baptism by Immersion. The New Testament convictions Wycliffe held reveal that he rejected Romish sacraments as a means of grace. Therefore he was more aligned to the Anabaptists than the Protestants that walked after him.

Rome denounced him as "*One of the seven heads that came out of the bottomless pit for denying infant baptism, that heresy of the Lollards, of whom he was so great a ring leader.*"⁵ He was also labeled "*That damnable heretic, John Wycliffe, reassumed the cursed opinions of Berengarians (Anabaptists).*"⁶ Wycliffe was considered, by the enemies of the Gospel during his day to be aligned to the Anabaptists known as the Lollards. It is not known who had a greater influence on whom concerning New Testament convictions, the Lollards on Wycliffe or Wycliffe on the Lollards. We do know that through the influence of John Wycliffe, the Lollards continued in the work long after his death.

Wycliffe's Bible-Men "Lollards"

Wycliffe spent his golden years preaching, teaching and training men to preach the Gospel. His students were known as "*Poor Priests*" who had once been ordained by the Church of Rome. Wycliffe taught these men how to live. They were not allowed to beg (the common practice of the Romish Black Friars at Oxford known as "Begging Friars") and they were to work for their basic needs. He taught them

how to preach and how to think theologically. His great concern was the exposition of the Scriptures. He taught them to open up the text and expound it in simple terms for the common man. He emphasized that preaching was the primary means God used for the salvation of sinners. Wycliffe understood that the preached Word of God would reveal the Light of the Gospel to that generation and beyond. He sent them out two-by-two saying, "*Go, Preach the Gospel.*"⁷ And last, he taught them how to die a martyr's death. Kenneth Connelly said "*He taught them how to reproduce.*"⁸

His preachers were easily spotted by all. They were shoeless, carried a staff in their hand, wore long rust colored gowns and they carried portions of Wycliffe's Bible with them. These men carried the light of the Gospel to every corner of the land. They preached in churches, in churchyards, open squares, market places, in homes and on the street corner. Their converts were so many that Bishop Knighton complained of the Bible-Men that "*Like their master they were too eloquent; that, they're mighty in words, they exceeded all men in making speeches.*" He complained, "*Every second man you met was a Lollard.*"

Hill Cliffe Church

The significance of this one church building alone refutes the "theory" that there were no immersing believers in England prior to 1641. This church building is found near Warrington, Cheshire. It was in a remote spot away from all roads in a heavily wooded area used by early Christians 700 years before the Reformation. The significance of this ancient church shows that Christians, during times of persecution, formed communities and churches that were independent of others and in opposition to the State Church. They chose to live in remote areas in order to live out their lives in Gospel purity with freedom and liberty of conscience. The only reason the Hill Cliffe Church needed to exist in that remote area was to escape persecution. It was designed with six different ways for easy escape. In 1841, the church building was renovated and a large baptistery made of stone, clearly designed for immersion,

was discovered. It is speculated that the Lollards used the Chapel because one of the tombstones in the adjoining graveyard is engraved with a date of 1357. Others are dated 1414, 1523 and 1599. There are extant deeds, which are dated in the 1600s, describing the property as being “for the Anabaptists.”⁹ This erected building used as a conventicle gives irrefutable proof of the antiquity of the Baptists in England. Even more amazing is the proof, found in the church’s baptistery; that the ancient Christians in Britain were immersing believers long before the early seventeenth century.

The Church in the Hop Garden

In 1481, during the end of the reign of Edward IV (1442–1483), a band of Anabaptists were discovered at Longworth, on the Berkshire side of the Thames, four miles from Abingdon, fourteen miles west of Oxford. It is not known how long the Christians had been there before they were discovered. Of course this date shows they were there before Henry VIII founded the Church of England. The church was called “The Longworth Meeting House” or “The Church in the Hop Garden.”

Dr. Creighton, Bishop of London, noted a band of men and women at Oxford known as the “Cathari.”¹⁰ He stated, “*They declared themselves to be Christians, who remembered the teachings of the Apostles, and believed in the canonical scriptures and in the one true church.*” The Bishop ordered the Cathari to be “*striped, branded as heretics, and publicly flogged out of the city, and driven to wander in the surrounding woods, and perished in the snows of winter.*” This group of martyrs preceded Wycliffe’s time and may have founded the Church in the Hop Garden.

It is also believed, with some certainty that the “Poore Preachers” of Wycliffe labored in the Hop Garden with Wycliffe’s new Translation of the Bible and read it at Longworth Market Cross. It may have been that Wycliffe’s Bible Men had already established this meeting place prior to Wycliffe or, possibly, it was established by Wycliffe’s preachers. The truths that Wycliffe taught his “Poore Preachers” and the truths they preached were that the Scriptures are the sole rule of faith and practice for all

believers. They preached salvation by grace alone. They emphasized that the Bible was binding on all men’s conscience and anything not found in the scriptures was not binding (a lasting Baptist distinctive). These people became known as the “Longworth Lollards.”

Whether the founding of the Church was by the Cathari, the Lollards, or possibly founded even earlier is not known. What is known is that they were a people who were faithful to the New Testament as their only rule for faith and practice. From the ascension to the throne of Henry IV (1399) and the law of capital punishment enacted in 1401 for the free public opinion of religious beliefs, the blood of the Lollards flowed constantly for the next 200 years.¹¹ By the time of Henry VIII, the Lollards were a people lost through persecution and eventually became known, generically as the hated “Anabaptists.” The church continued throughout the centuries and the last recorded pastor of the church was Thomas Jones who began his ministry in 1934.

Conclusion

Even the great Lutheran historian, John Mosheim disagreed with our current Baptist historians concerning the antiquity of the Baptists. He quoted the Baptist historian, B. Evans concerning the antiquity of the English Baptists. Evans stated, “*The true origin of the sect which acquired the denomination of Anabaptists by their administering anew the rite of baptism to those who come over to their communion... is hid in the remote depths of antiquity, and is, of consequence, extremely difficult to be ascertained.*”¹²

The Quaker Historian, Robert Barclay is also in disagreement with our contemporary scholars. He wrote, “*The rise of the Anabaptists took place long prior to the foundation of the Church of England, and there are also reasons for believing that on the Continent of Europe, small hidden societies, who held many of the opinions of the Anabaptists, have existed from the time of the apostles. It seems probable that these churches have a lineage of succession more ancient than the Roman Church.*”¹³

Statements like these are common-

place in Protestant and Baptist histories dating back two centuries. Yet, we are witnessing a new phenomenon by our own Baptist historians, who are asserting that Baptists were born out of the English Separatist movement. Their new interpretation of historical fact does not at all correspond with the truth of history concerning the antiquity of the Baptists.

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¹ See article *Baptist Doctrines and Distinctives, Part IV The Modern Phenomena of Denying our Baptist Heritage.*

² John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. 1, p. 925.

³ J.T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. I, p. 177.

⁴ William Cathcart, *The Baptist Encyclopedia, Doctrines, Ordinances, General History*, pp. 886-887.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 185-186.

⁶ Ibid. p.186.

⁷ John Stanley, *The Church in the Hop Garden*, The Kingsgate Press, p. 261.

⁸ Kenneth Connolly, *History of the English Bible*, Video.

⁹ J.T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. I, pp. 182-183.

¹⁰ John Stanley, *The Church in the Hop Garden*, p. 34.

¹¹ Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, Vol. I, p. 328.

¹² John Mosheim, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 4, Ch. 3, p. 429.

¹³ Robert Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, p. 12.

Walking with the Lord

By M. A. Bailon

The Apostle Paul knew something about being religious. He understood that men are inherently religious but prone to walk by sight and not by faith. In fact, sinful men use physical means to gain power and control over others through religious rites and rituals. This is not done by overpowering others through physical strength. Ungodly men appearing to be spiritual gain control over others by having their captives submit to various religious actions and activities. In the case of the cults the ungodliness of their practices is understood even by the unsaved. But in more mainline evangelistic circles the issues are much more subtle and not as insid-

ious. Near the conclusion of his letter to the Philippians Paul writes:

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

Paul wants to safeguard these believers from wicked men. He warns them to watch out for the Judaizers calling them *the dogs, the troublemakers and those who mutilate*;¹ the last description being a somewhat stark characterization of circumcision. Therefore, Paul, using the emphatic personal pronoun, declares that “we are the circumcision” as if he were standing in their midst with open arms turning to his left and then to his right. He further clarifies that the “we” refers to those who are serving and worshipping God in the spirit. Moreover, he means those who *have no trust* in outward or physical proofs of salvation. Now dealing with spiritual issues is a little tricky, and, determining what is spiritual and what is in the flesh is difficult. To be sure, Paul mentions “the flesh” because the Judaizers relied on their physical heritage and circumcision. But to convince everyone that we are Christians, it is a small step from relying on who we are to relying on what we did, and then from what we did to what we do. For example, it is not wise to believe that one is saved because one takes the Lord’s Supper. In Paul’s day the Jews were trusting in their circumcision and in their forefather Abraham. That is the New Testament example of trusting in the flesh. Today, the Lord’s Supper and attending church are a means of grace. It is necessary to attend to the Lord’s Supper and to your churches’ set meetings in order to manifest a credible Christian profession. But, *it is not sufficient*. To forego these means of grace does not necessarily mean that a person is not saved, just as attending to them does not mean that one is saved. But if someone does not use the God ordained means of grace then it could be because the person is not interested in grace. I am not interested in night clubbing therefore I don’t go to night clubs. If you are not interested in grace or if you do not understand it, then what would compel you to attend all of

your churches’ meetings? The meetings are not set just so the people of God have something to do on Sunday and Wednesday. The meetings are set for the edification of believers. Why wouldn’t you want to attend the meetings instituted to strengthen you?

There are, I’m afraid, more subtle issues than this. Part of the problem is the strong tendency we have to gravitate towards doing something to show everyone, including ourselves, that we are spiritual Christians. The other part of the problem is that the church itself as an institution ordained by God for the edification of the church is not doing its job. In particular, I am concerned with discipleship teams that are organized to allow men and women to share their spiritual struggles and triumphs with one another in order to maintain some accountability. Ostensibly, these types of groups could be construed as a means of grace for those who attend. But these meetings and the relationships formed therein are vulnerable to becoming an end in themselves rather than the avowed means to an end. They become an end in and of themselves if, and when, the discipline they engender is solely based upon the external pressure they supply. Does the Christian truly need the external coercion to get by? Only the individual knows this! Do the meetings take the place of personal private prayer? No one can really say except the individual. Only the individual knows if he or she is worshipping and serving God in the spirit or ever so slightly trusting in what he or she is doing. The real problem in all this is that the Holy Spirit works through the ministry of the church; primarily through preaching, although also through the prayer meetings and conferences. But when the church fails, it shows in the weakness of its members. In order to do something to help those who struggle with sin, discipleship teams are formed. But since they are not necessarily blessed by God, they are vulnerable to deception. We know that God blesses a faithful preaching ministry. And, that to the extent that the church adheres to the principles set down in the Scriptures, to that extent the Holy Spirit works in the lives of the members. God has ordained that the church is where the

Word is proclaimed by a man of God who has been called to the preaching and teaching ministry. He has not ordained Bible study leaders, self appointed or otherwise. The men and women who lead such groups are not necessarily evil, but the fact that these groups are not ordained by God makes them vulnerable. These discipleship teams are established because the preaching ministry is not adequate to equip the saints. Therefore, to some extent the meetings are not spiritual. The Holy Spirit is not as free to operate in that venue as He is in the local assembly. Thus, these discipleship ministries help the weak Christian to have confidence in the flesh because of the external constraints that these meetings afford. Accountability is good, but it is much better if the church ministries provide that accountability. The church leadership may institute these accountability groups but that does not make them legitimate venues for the working of the Spirit. This is not to say that God is limited. But if He has provided the church with preachers and teachers for the edification of the church why would He subsequently provide “mini-church” ministries for the same purpose? Perhaps these meetings are more man-made than God ordained.

Paul goes on to address the issue of “doing.” He says that if it was profitable to have confidence in the flesh, then he would excel there. He was as Jewish as they come, and more so. He had so much zeal he persecuted the church. Concerning the righteousness that comes from the keeping of the law he had become faultless. He kept the law to a fault, as the saying goes. Yet, he persecuted the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can be blinded to areas in our lives where we are self-righteous. We can become self satisfied with our religious zeal. Paul thought he had arrived! Do you? Do I? He thought he had arrived because of what he did. He prayed every day at every set time. He attended synagogue. He fasted. He gloried in the fact that he was of the tribe of Benjamin. He looked and reveled in all of these outward things. But he learned that the true people of God, the true circumcision, serve in the realm of the spirit.

Lastly, to worship in the spirit does

not mean that what we do is meaningless and that what we do does not matter. This is also an error. What we think is expressed in what we do. If we think spiritually, then the things of the spirit will be reflected in our actions. And, after all, is not the spirit called the Holy Spirit? Thus, one would expect holy living from those who serve God according to the spirit. The issue that every Christian must deal with is whether or not our actions, including our church attendance, is an end in itself, or truly a means to an end. Do you attend church meetings in order to be a Christian? Or, do you attend the meetings because you are a Christian? No one but you can answer. But it is clear from the Scriptures that there is a danger in trusting in the flesh no matter how understated that trusting is.

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¹ These names are articular in the Greek, carrying the definite article. Paul is characterizing a definite class of men. Βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν.

Studies on Revival of Religion: Part 3

By W. R. Downing

Has the "Age of Revivals" Passed?

It is commonly thought in some Evangelical, Fundamentalist and even some Reformed circles today that there was a great era or "Age of Revivals" that largely extended from the early eighteenth century into the mid-nineteenth century. This was the era of the first and second "Great Awakenings" (c. 1734–1750, 1793–1859), which greatly affected Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic. This era, it is said, began with the first "Great Awakening" and the preaching of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards and extended to the great "Fulton Street Revival" or "Prayer Revival" of 1858, which spread throughout the United States and then to Northern Ireland, and then throughout Great Britain in 1858–1859. This last revival marked the end of international revival and spiritual awakening. Following this there have been but sporadic and limited out-pourings of the Spirit in isolated instances—a sign that

the great era of revivals has passed.

There are various reasons and suggestions for such a view. These will be examined and evaluated. However, before doing so, it ought to be understood that revivals of religion have occurred both before and after the so-called "Age of Revivals." Even though the records are scarce because of the pre-Reformation power of Rome, we have incidents of revivals and spiritual awakenings prior to the Sixteenth Century Reformation, and also times of revival since then, some of which were substantial in their effects. There were several revivals or spiritual awakenings in the 1500s in connection with the Protestant Reformation and the 1600s witnessed several significant revivals in Scotland. Since the so-called "Era of Revivals," we can point to the series of Welsh revivals that continued from 1859 to 1904, the "Korean Pentecost" or revival of 1908, the "Fisher Folk Revival" in Britain in the 1920s and others.

There are general reasons for the demise of revivals and of the scriptural and historic teaching concerning them: the loss of a Christian Base in society, a decline in Calvinistic theology, the advent and influence of revivalism," Modern Christians have neither been taught nor urged to pray for revival, confusing revival with "revivalism," and so viewing the whole subject with great suspicion, and Christian social activism. We will limit our study to the first reason.

Since the 1860s and last great international out-pouring of the Spirit, our society has become increasingly secularized. With this secularization, personal piety and practical religion have been seriously down-graded. The modern "carnal Christian" heresy, deriving in part from the effects of "revivalism" and from an antinomian Dispensational teaching which abrogates the Moral Law, has often produced a worldly Christianity as the norm. The outward and open sinfulness of society knows little true religious restraint. The statist educational system with its avowed atheism, teaching of evolution and alleged "amorality,"¹ the sexual revolution and the modern drug culture, with the other elements of postmodern philosophy have all taken

their toll. We now live in a thoroughly secularized society which has little place for serious biblical religion. We are told that this present age must end in "The Great Apostasy,"² and that we have no direction or anticipation in Scripture to pray for revival. We are told that times are too sinful, too antagonistic, too far gone for revival. We are told that we are living in what some religious leaders and philosophers call "the post-Christian era."

Arnold Dallimore begins his great work on the Life and Ministry of George Whitefield with this very issue, and in the first chapter demonstrates that such reasoning about this present era being too sinful for revival is without adequate foundation:

Over the past thirty years numerous evangelical people have been saying, "There can never be another revival! The times are far too evil. Sin is now too rampant. We are in the midst of apostasy and the days of revival are gone for ever!"

The history of the eighteenth-century Revival entirely contradicts that view. It demonstrates that true revival is the work of God—not man—of God who is not limited by such circumstances as the extent of human sin or the degree of mankind's unbelief. In the decade between 1730 and 1740 the life of England was foul with moral corruption and crippled by spiritual decay, yet it was amidst such conditions—conditions remarkably similar to those of the English-speaking world to-day—that God arose in the mighty exercise of His power which became the eighteenth-century Revival....Archbishop Secker, writing in 1738, asserted:

In this we cannot be mistaken, that an open and professed disregard to religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the present age. This evil has already brought in such dissoluteness and contempt of principle in the higher part of the world, and such profligate intemperance and fearlessness of committing crimes in the lower, as must, if this torrent of impiety stop not, become absolutely fatal.

But how was 'this torrent of impiety' to be stopped? It was evident that the writing of scholarly books in defence of Christianity would not suffice, for it had been tried, but with little avail. Nor would the threat of punishment, for the informing on wrongdoers and the increase of hangings had but hardened the criminal mind. The successive failures of the several attempts to better conditions simply proved that the nation's trouble lay basically with the individual human heart and that the 'torrent of impiety' would flow until some power was found that could stanch it at its source.

During the very months in which Bishop Secker wrote his foreboding words, England was startled by the sound of a voice. It was the voice of a preacher, George Whitefield, a clergyman but twenty-two years old, who was declaring the Gospel in the pulpits of London with such fervour and power, that no church would hold the multitudes that flocked to hear....The effect has been described in the words:

...a religious revival burst forth...which changed in a few years the whole temper of English society. The Church was restored to life and activity. Religion carried to the hearts of the people a fresh spirit of moral zeal, while it purified our literature and our manners. A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education.³

John T. Christian, the Baptist historian, wrote concerning like sinful circumstances in Colonial America.⁴ Effion Evans cites the spiritual declension and apathy that prevailed in New Londonderry, Pennsylvania, previous to 1740:

The most part seemed to rest contented, and to satisfy their consciences just with a dead formality in religion. A very lamentable ignorance of the main essentials of true practical religion, and the doctrines next related thereto, very generally prevailed...There was scarcely any suspicion at all of any danger of depending upon self-righteousness, and not upon the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation.

Yet in the midst of such a decadent atmosphere, a great revival broke forth that transformed not only the churches, but society itself—and laid the moral foundation for the coming independent Republic of these United States of America.

The sinfulness of men presents no insurmountable obstacle to an out-pouring of God's Spirit. Indeed, our present circumstances, sad and terrible as they are, ought to be a great encouragement to remain faithful, evangelize and pray for God to gather in his harvest! If, indeed, "salvation is of the Lord," then his hand is neither shortened nor his power abated. The hope of our nation must be sought in the spiritual realm, not the political, the merely moral or the social. Let us beseech the Lord God for a season Divine visitation!

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¹ As we live in a God-created universe, every fact is a created fact, and thus "amorality" is impossible for man. He is either moral or immoral in the context of God's Moral Law.

² "The Great Apostasy" is prophesied in 2Thess. 2:1-12.

³ Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, pp. 19-32.

⁴ John T. Christian, *History of the Baptists*, II, pp. 168-169.

⁵ Effion Evans, *Revivals- Their Rise, Progress and Achievements*, p. 4.

Further Thoughts on Revival

By W. R. Downing

Prayer and Revival

There is a direct correlation between prayer and revival. Both Scripture and history witness that there is a direct connection between prayer meetings and revival. God does not send revival and spiritual awakening to people who do not pray—ardently, fervently, passionately and perseveringly seek the face of God for them. The great prototype of all revival, which began on the Day of Pentecost, was preceded by a prayer meeting which was characterized by concentration, perseverance and unity of purpose (Acts 1:14).

Can we expect revival—the blessing of the presence and power of the Spirit of God reviving the church and converting the unsaved—unless we pray? Unless we have meetings specifically for prayer? We must pray, we must pray together, we must pray earnestly, we must persevere, and we must pray with a unity of purpose, laying aside all personal agenda and anything foreign or grievous to the Holy Spirit. What glorious blessings we only obtain through prayer!

Prayer for Revival

Both Scripture and history witness to the effectiveness of prayer for revival and spiritual awakening. This relation was instituted at Pentecost by the waiting church at Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). It was renewed during that great, Apostolic revival (Acts 4:24-31). Subsequent history has repeatedly witnessed to this relationship between prayer and revival. Examples can be seen and historically verified by remaining records in the Kirk O' Shotts Revival in 1630, the Cambuslang Revival in

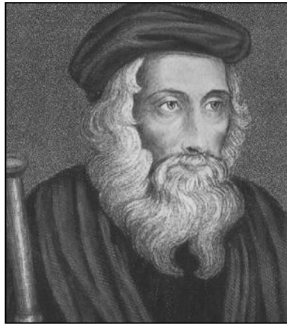
Scotland in the 1740s, the Baptist prayer meetings in the eighteenth century which resulted in both revival and the beginnings of the modern missionary movement, the revival under Spurgeon's ministry in London in 1854, and in the "Great Prayer Revival" which began on Fulton Street in New York City in 1858 and spread over both the United States and throughout Great Britain. The Welsh Revival and the subsequent spread of its influence around the world from 1904 to 1910 to such places as Africa and Korea was carried on by believing prayer. May the witness of both Scripture and history stir us to believing and persevering prayer!

Longing for Revival

Revival has been described as "a people saturated with God." To be overpowered by a sense of God, however, may not be something wonderful; it might be utterly devastating. Do we long for revival? Do we earnestly long for God to give us a sense of himself, of his holiness and our unholiness? of his righteousness and our unrighteousness? of his absolute sovereign power and our creatureliness and utter lack of power? Have we come to realize in the very depths of our being the words of our Lord, "without me ye can do nothing"? Are we willing to come to terms with our sins? our secret, heart sins? every sin?

When revival came to the large gathering of Korean pastors in the "Korean Pentecost" of 1908, it came with a confession of sin which was devastating. One recalls that he never wanted to attend such a meeting again as long as he lived! He said that every sin imaginable was openly confessed that night. The Spirit of God was mightily at work and nothing was held back. Is this really what we want? True, fervent prayer will lead to confession of sin, and confession of sin will bring God's blessing. But are we willing to come to terms with our most treasured sins? As the sinner must be brought low by a conviction of sin before he finds peace in the Lord Jesus, so revival might well mean the same devastating experience before the blessing is sent by God.

Images from Church History



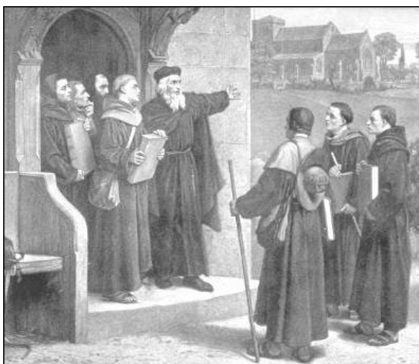
John Wycliffe¹
(1319-1384)

John Wycliffe was an English religious reformer and the first person to begin a systematic translation of the Bible into English. He is called the “Morning Star of the Reformation,” because of his protests against certain practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

The church considered Wycliffe’s teachings dangerous, and pronounced him a heretic. In 1377, Pope Gregory XI issued five *papel bulls* (decrees) attacking him and demanding his imprisonment.

Wycliffe died in 1384. In 1428, at the order of Pope Martin V, his body was burned and his ashes were scattered on the River Swift.²

Wycliffe Sending Out the Lollards³



Wycliffe and the Churchmen

Wycliffe was at Oxford in the year 1379, busied in the discharge of his duties as professor of divinity, when he fell dangerously ill. His was not a strong constitution; and work, age, and above all, persecution, had weakened him. Great was the joy in the monasteries; but for that joy to be complete the heretic must recant. Every effort was made to bring this about in his last moments.

The four regents, who represented the four religious orders, accompanied by four aldermen, hastened to the bedside of the dying man, hoping to frighten him by threatening him with the vengeance of Heaven. They found him calm and serene. “You have death on your lips,” said they; “be touched by your faults, and reflect in our presence all that you have said to our injury.” Wycliffe remained silent, and the monks flattered themselves with an easy victory. But the nearer the Reformer approached eternity, the greater was his horror of monkery. The consolation he had found in Jesus Christ had given him fresh energy. He begged his servant to raise him on his couch. Then feeble and pale, and scarcely able to support himself, he turned toward the friars, who were waiting for his recantation, and opening his

livid lips, and fixing on them a piercing look, he said, with emphasis: “I shall not die but live, and again declare the evil deeds of the friars.” We might almost picture to ourselves the spirit of Elijah threatening the priests of Baal. The regents and their companions looked at each other with astonishment. They left the room in confusion, and the Reformer recovered to put the finishing touch to the most important of his works against the monks and against the pope.⁴

¹ Image from <http://sebrunoleandro.wordpress.com/2009/12/31/>

² *The World Book Encyclopedia*, 1964, Vol. 30, Wig to Zym, pp.426-427.

³ Image from <http://arquivom.wordpress.com/2008/12/01/a-reforma/>

⁴ J. H. Merle D’Aubigne, *History of the Reformation*, Vol. 2, p. 316.

