

Why Is There Chaff in My Wheat?

And Why Is Revival So Messy?

Rockey Jackson - March 30, 2001

Section 8 of 9

Why Is Revival So Messy, Shouldn't It Be Clean and Neat?

*What is this we've heard about revival
In the places it has broken out?
It's really a mess with people getting blessed
And falling all over the place.
Then have you heard about the manifestations?
They're too weird for us to describe.
Now if God's in that, I'll eat my hat.
"He's not," says my spiritual guide!
Well I'll never go to see such a show.
What normal person would?
Yes I'll stay home with the routine I've known,
And my god who behaves as he should.*

There are reports that revival has broken out here and there in the land. Some contend that what's happening doesn't qualify to be called a revival. So let's see what the definition of revival is. When we look in the dictionary, we find that revival has both secular and religious definitions. The religious definition is: "a reawakening of interest in religion; a meeting or series of meetings for the purpose of reawakening religious faith, often characterized by impassioned preaching and public professions of faith." Now let's see if the current revival fits the dictionary definition. We'll consider only two of the most written about locations of the current revival. At the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, they have held meetings six days a week for over seven years now. At the Brownsville Assembly of God in Pensacola, Florida, U.S.A., people have been lining up for several years now at 5:30 in the morning to get a seat in the evening services that begin at 7:30 p.m. several days each week. It probably goes without saying that the preaching is reported to be impassioned. People have journeyed from every corner of the world to each of these sites to see what is going on and to experience it for themselves. More Christians have had the vitality of their faith restored and there have been more first time public professions of faith (not rededications) at these two sites than in any previous historically recognized period of revival. The evidence clearly shows that what's happening fits the dictionary definition of revival. So we can take heart that apparently there is revival in the land whether we've been personally touched by it yet or not.

Along with the reports of revival have come stories of miracles, people falling down as they're overcome by the power of God, and many other strange manifestations that testify to the fact that something out of the ordinary is happening. It's reported to be both exciting and messy. People report that their lives have been changed by an encounter with God. Many others have made professions of faith and become established members in a local church, but there are also reports that the sites where revival has broken out have problems too. So why is something that is

reportedly so wonderful also so unpredictable and messy? Does the Bible have any wisdom to share concerning something like this? Yes, in the book of Proverbs it says:

**“Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; but much increase comes by the strength of an ox”
Prov. 14:4.**

Here again, we have an agricultural illustration taken from the real world. The people who kept oxen knew the reality that if they wanted the benefit of an ox to plow their fields, pull their carts, and thresh their grain then they had to put up with the mess the ox made. He had to be fed everyday and the manure he dropped in his stall had to be cleaned out everyday. Extracting the principles from this scripture, we could say that if we want the good things that something produces, then we must also put up with the mess and waste of the process that produces it. Or in our consumer culture, if we want the product then we have to accept the package it comes in. So let's look at some of the aspects of revival and see how this wisdom and the other things we've learned apply to it. If the current revival isn't just the next act in the theater of religion, then we should expect it to be real and exhibit characteristics similar to the real world Biblical illustrations we just studied.

It has been noted that the current revival isn't church as usual. It's really quite a mess. Critics of the current revival have discerned that it has a lot of aspects that are equivalent to useless chaff. They're right. There are all kinds of strange manifestations reported that don't seem to perform any useful purpose, but the critics understanding of chaff seems to go no deeper than, “It's chaff, so it's bad.” As we saw above, even though the chaff isn't the fruit we're trying to produce with our lives, it's still very important. The critics have failed to realize that chaff is the very environment that the wheat grows in. Though the participants of revival can't always explain a direct cause and effect for each manifestation, they do report that they find them to be beneficial and a part of the environment in which revival has grown.

Many have noted that the current revival contains a lot of wood, hay, and stubble and they're right again. It has all kinds of stuff that will burn up when the Lord tests it with fire. There is nothing wrong with their discernment, but as we saw above these things are often important to producing what we do want. Their interpretation appears to be very shallow again: “Things that will burn up are bad.” They don't seem to understand that it takes a lot of tools, forms, patterns, and in some cases things that literally burn up right here on earth to produce the things we desire. We've noted in illustration after illustration that the processes producing the things we want are often quite messy and they also produce scraps and waste. It seems that the critics don't want to go through the process of revival. They just want the finished product. It's what we've become accustomed to in our consumer culture.

Some have given themselves to root out the chaff and rid the church of it along with the other temporal things we've noted are indeed to be found in the current revival, but is this necessary? Here is a story that I believe will help answer that question. Dr. William Brown, an osteopathic physician and surgeon, brought me into this world. He was of the old school of doctors and his wife was his nurse. He practiced medicine at his office/home just off the corner of 38th and Federal in Denver. When I was born, the nurses at the hospital told my mother that Dr. Brown was a good doctor when he was young. Well, I'd like to politely disagree with them. Though he

was older, he expertly sewed me up when I was cut, set my broken bones, and kept me healthy all of my growing years. While I was in college he finally retired from his medical practice. He was in his early nineties at the time. I've never had another doctor that I would even begin to compare with Dr. Brown in either manner or competence. From his many years of medical practice, Dr. Brown had developed a solid belief that he shouldn't interfere with the birth process unless it was absolutely necessary. He summed up his belief in this quote: "God has made the world in such a way that when an apple is ripe it falls from the tree." What this old school doctor knew from experience, we're just beginning to confirm through research in a related field. Today in psychology we're finding out that those who were forcefully brought into the world through either induced labor or caesarean section share the common trait of anger. This anger has been traced back to the time of their birth. They're angry at the world for making them leave the womb before they were ready.

Wheat is easy to separate from the chaff when the chaff's job is done and even if the farmer doesn't harvest it, God has made the head of wheat so that it will still shatter and spread the seed. When a baby is born, it doesn't take a team of micro surgeons to separate it from the afterbirth as if it were a Siamese twin. No, the umbilical cord is simply cut. If no one is there to help, God has made things in such a way that it simply breaks. God has given mothers in even the most primitive cultures enough common sense to leave the afterbirth in the bush and to take the baby back to their homes. Farmers, seamstresses, manufacturers, and builders all know when their product is finished. They know the difference between waste, tools, and their product. We need to give people and God more credit and have some faith that they can work it out together. All of the evidence suggests that if the chaff, wood, hay, and stubble are still present, then they're still doing the job they were intended to do. After all, "God has made the world in such a way that when an apple is ripe it falls from the tree."

Many critics want the current revival to mature and grow out of the "useless things." However, as we've seen, these useless things are the very things that are producing the revival and are the package it has grown in. Revival is occurring person by person with new people coming into it and new sites catching the fire of revival every day. If this is the beginning of the end time harvest, then this revival will continue to the end. If the things that are producing the current revival die out, it will be because it has gone through some type of spiritual menopause. Maturity is a blessing, but menopause is a curse. It would be the death of this revival as it has been the death of previous revivals.

Many critics are concerned that the participants in the current revival have their focus on the wrong things. It's feared that they're becoming addicted to the spiritual highs. It's said that they're chasing after miracles and manifestations instead of seeking only the Lord. There is fear that they are focusing too much on the process instead of the product. In our consumer oriented society we've been conditioned to only concentrate on the product. We buy our food, our clothes, and our houses ready-made. We focus only on the end result without ever giving a thought to the process that produced it. That's what we've become accustomed to in the church as well.

Is that the way it should be? Isn't it better to actually have a passion for what we do? A bit of maternal wisdom I recently read in a magazine was: "If you want to do it, then you don't have to do it." In our culture, many people only work for the bottom line, a paycheck, but there are other

people who actually enjoy their work. They aren't just proud of the product they produce, but they also have a passion for the process that produces it.

Most farmers will gladly tell you that they grow the food you eat. If you're around at harvest, they'll point out to you the grain as it goes off to storage. However if you really want to get them excited, let them proudly show off their fields of green and growing wheat still in the chaff. They enjoy the process: the plowing, the planting, the cultivating, and the harvesting. They're passionate about the plants growing in the field.

Each time my wife became pregnant we proudly acknowledged that she was soon to give birth, a new life was on the way. We were passionate about being parents and we didn't wait until the new baby was in our arms to let people know it.

I've never had a rancher show me the meat in his freezer. But you should see a rancher's eyes light up if you go with him out to his pasture and let him show off his herd. They're glad for the money when the yearlings sell, but they're in the business because they enjoy working with the animals. They hold fairs and they travel to stock shows to show off their animals and to see the animals others have grown. If they didn't enjoy it, they would do something else. Believe me, there are easier ways to make a living today.

A seamstress will excitedly display a scrap of cloth and the picture on the pattern's sack to tell of a dress that's not yet made. Seamstresses in our culture don't sew because they have to make clothes for their family. It's much easier to buy them. They sew them because they enjoy sewing and they have a passion for creating their own clothes.

Lockheed Martin Aerospace (where I work) recently produced and distributed to each employee a video of the first flight of a new series of space launch vehicles. For a few short minutes we could watch that rocket burn up over and over again on our VCR's. The producers of the film were so passionate and focused on that rocket which burned up that they didn't even bother to tell us what payload that space launch vehicle carried into orbit.

My parents didn't wait until everything was great to give tours of their retirement home. Why they'd show it off to anybody who'd drop by, no matter what state the house was in. They were most excited the first time I saw it, right after they'd bought it, while it was still filled with filth and decay. That's also when I reacted the most negatively to their gem. Do you know what? They were right and I was wrong!

In each of these illustrations, none of those involved lost sight of the goal, the finished product they were producing. Those who do the best work and are the most successful don't just have a passion for their product; they actually have a passion for the process that makes the product. Let's state it unequivocally. Let's not leave any doubt. It is natural to get excited about revival. It is okay to have a passion for the process of revival and it's appropriate to enjoy revival. If we "want" to have revival, then we can get excited about it and enjoy it. If we "have" to have revival, then we will be forced to endure it. It's our attitude that will make the difference.

In the places where revival has broken out, it's reported that things are no longer orderly. The people involved aren't acting according to our polite conventions and they're definitely not following the traditions handed down to us by our fathers. The meetings often take unplanned turns and change without warning. People are reporting that God is touching and changing them in many untraditional ways. The services, the people, and even God have become unpredictable. Could this be explained by what we've studied above? If revival is approaching the boundary between heaven and earth, between God and man, then we should expect it to be unpredictable.

Some critics of the revival say that it is out of control. They point to the manifestations that are occurring and say that God would never work that way, but as we saw above, the scriptures say that we cannot know the works of God. Before we allow someone to define for us the limits of God's works, we need to have them demonstrate that they can do the following three things. First, that they can accurately predict the weather. Second, that they can explain how a baby's bones grow in its mother's womb. Third, they must accurately predict the long-range consequences of their actions. Since no one can do these three things, neither can anyone "know the works of God." Therefore, we should not allow another person to set limits on what God can do.

The Apostle Paul writing to the Church at Corinth put it this way in 1 Cor. 2:14: **"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."** God didn't ask man if it was okay to package wheat in chaff. He did not ask our opinion about wrapping babies in afterbirth. Neither has He asked any man what He can and cannot bring forth in revival. We can't determine what will happen in revival by thinking about it. We can't form committees to discuss the possibilities and vote various attributes in and others out. The only way we can know what God is doing in revival is to go to places where revival is occurring and see what He is doing. When we get there, we will miss the whole point if we judge what we see by worldly human standards because the things of the Spirit of God are spiritually discerned. We don't walk in blind, and we don't give up our discernment. Just because some manifestation occurs in a revival setting doesn't mean that it's from God. We are still required to test every manifestation, but we must allow God (not Jezebel, Religion, and Control) to guide our judgment with His spiritual discernment.

There are those who have noted that some people found in revival churches fake manifestations and others are not sincere in their faith. They are correct. Our Lord Jesus Christ warned us that there would be tares in His field that had been planted there by His enemy. This is the same as it is in all churches. We must keep our wits about us and discern the spirit of each person, each leader, and each teaching. Do they demonstrate the Spirit of the Lord? We should expect the people at a revival church to be no better and no worse than they are at any other church. They will be a cross section of the population, differing in intelligence, personality, and common sense. We should expect the leaders to be no better and no worse than leaders throughout the Church. They are human beings and they will make mistakes. Some of them will stumble and some will fall. We can count on it. Recognizing this fact, we should always check ourselves to be sure we are established in the word of God and committed to the Lord, not a particular revival leader. There is no reason to expect that the teachings of a revival church will be any better or

any worse than any other church. As with all who claim to be Christians, we need to discern whether or not they hold to the basics of the faith and preach the gospel:

“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,” 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

Beyond that we don't need to argue over opinions and non-essential teachings. We can trust that the Lord is growing the people, the leaders, and the teachings of revival churches to maturity just the same as He is doing in every other church. On the other hand we should also be able to discern those detractors of revival who wish to test revival churches based on their own special emphasis and other divisive doctrines that have continually divided the church. They will always find a following, but we must recognize who they are and dismiss them. Revival is too important to waste our time squabbling over non-essentials.

It appears that many of the critics of revival approach it with a consumer mindset. They believe that we can adjust the process of revival to make it clean and sterile so that it is like church as usual. They fail to realize that the miracles, manifestations, unpredictability, and problem people are included part and parcel in the process of revival. These things are the package revival comes in. Revival cannot be cleaned up with a one-time adjustment to the process that removes all of the problems. The problem is that the very process that gives us the fruit of revival is messy and produces waste. As long as we are producing the fruit of revival, we will continually have to clean up the mess and dispose of the trash that it creates.

*Have you ever watched children on Christmas day?
They set aside their toys and with the boxes they play.
But it seems that things usually work themselves out,
And boxes are forgotten when the trash goes out.*

*Don't worry dear parents the glitter won't last.
The boxes and ribbons will be gone pretty fast.
And the present you've given will still be found
To give your child pleasure all the year 'round.*