

Chapter 3. Biblical and Theological Implications

Biblical Context of Revival

In Biblical history, corporate spiritual revivals did not emerge as a method by which God restored large groups of people until the era of the judges. The Garden of Eden was radically altered by Adam and Eve's sin against God, resulting in a spiritual separation between God and humanity. God's response was to curse them and exile them from the garden. Although a prophetic hope was given for a future redemption, Adam and his immediate descendants continued to live in this separation.

Spiritual decline continued until the days of Noah, when God described the generation as hopelessly corrupt. "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time."¹ Rather than attempt to reform the generation, God's remedy was to work in the life of one man and his family, while cleansing the earth of the remainder of humanity through the flood. God blessed Noah with a family and the number of followers increased through succeeding generations.

Several generations later, God called Abraham to leave his home and go to a distant land. In response to Abraham's obedience and faith, God blessed him and promised to build a new nation through him. The descendants of Abraham formed the nation of Israel, which first developed a national identity as Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt. Just as Moses was receiving the commandments from God, Israel turned away from God to worship idols. God's patience was often tested by Israel's grumbling and

¹ Genesis 6:5 (New International Version).

unfaithfulness in their journey away from Egypt. When they fearfully refused to enter the Promised Land, God punished them by barring them from their new home and he caused them to wander aimlessly for forty years. He waited for the next generation to continue his plan for them to live in the land he had promised to Abraham.

Once Israel entered the Promised Land, God empowered them to have an amazing victory over the inhabitants. Joshua led them through this conquest and as long as he lived, the people followed God faithfully. However, when all who had witnessed these supernatural victories had died, the next generation experienced another spiritual lapse. “After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD and served the Baals.”² God’s chosen people had inherited the land, but dared to defy God by worshiping idols. The stage was now set for God to begin a corporate spiritual revival within the generation that had rebelled against him.

Revival Cycle in Judges

Their disobedience and idolatry stirred God’s anger. God did not curse them as he had done in the Garden of Eden. He did not destroy the sinful generation, as he had done in the days of Noah. Neither did he leave them to wander adrift, as he had done just a few generation prior. Rather, God withdrew his blessing and protection from them, allowing their enemies to defeat them. He “handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to

² Judges 2:10-11 (New International Version).

resist.”³ He actively battled against them to the point where “they were in great distress.”⁴

God’s purpose was evidently not to destroy Israel, but rather to expose their need for his constant provision so that they would be drawn back into a faithful relationship with him. “The LORD had compassion on them as they groaned under those who oppressed and afflicted them.”⁵ God’s grace was evidenced through the provision of a godly leader or judge to keep them obedient to God’s law and to lead them in battle. “Whenever the LORD raised up a judge for them, he was with the judge and saved them out of the hands of their enemies as long as the judge lived.”⁶

The book of Judges describes repeated cycles in which Israel was restored to obedience in a similar manner. Unfortunately, there was invariably a return to sin following the death of the judge, occasionally to a state worse than before. “But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshiping them.”⁷ Despite the tendency for Israel to return to their sin in successive generations, God demonstrated a patient and compassionate nature both through his discipline and responsiveness to Israel’s pleas for help.

³ Judges 2:14 (New International Version).

⁴ Judges 2:15 (New International Version).

⁵ Judges 2:18 (New International Version).

⁶ Judges 2:18 (New International Version).

⁷ Judges 2:19 (New International Version).

Revival Teaching Under David and Solomon

As Israel moved from judges to kings, the nature of the cycle did not change significantly. When Saul, Israel's first king, disobeyed God, he was removed from his throne and David assumed the throne after a prolonged struggle. David's prayer, found in the Psalms reflects a yearning to be restored to an intimate relationship with God,

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Show us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation.⁸

Early in the monarchy this revival cycle was more formally acknowledged and God made a commitment to receive the people back if they would return with certain conditions. As Solomon was dedicating the temple, he prayed:

When your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you and when they turn back and confess your name, praying and making supplication before you in this temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their fathers.⁹

Despite the fact that Israel at this time was faithfully serving the Lord, Solomon conceded that there would inevitably be a time when his people would sin against God.

When they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you become angry with them and give them over to the enemy, who takes them captive to a land far away or near; and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their

⁸ Psalms 85:6-7 (New International Version).

⁹ 2 Chronicles 6:24-25 (New International Version).

captivity and say, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong and acted wickedly'; and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in the land of their captivity where they were taken, and pray toward the land you gave their fathers, toward the city you have chosen and toward the temple I have built for your Name; then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their pleas, and uphold their cause. And forgive your people, who have sinned against you.¹⁰

God responded to Solomon's prayer with a conditional promise. If at that point Israel would genuinely return to God in four specific ways, then he would restore them.

I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.¹¹

The four conditions contained in this passage are clearly delineated as God's requirements for revival and are consistently supported throughout Scripture. As the church today considers the question, "What should we do in order to experience revival?", these prerequisites are the most comprehensive answers which could be provided. Before God will bring revival, we must:

1) Humble Ourselves before God.

¹⁰ 2 Chronicles 7:36-39 (New International Version).

¹¹ 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 (New International Version).

- 2) Earnestly Pray for Renewal.
- 3) Seek Only God's Face.
- 4) Turn from Our Wicked Ways.

Revival Under King Hezekiah

King Hezekiah is an excellent illustration of God's promises carried out. Two hundred years after Solomon's reign, Ahaz reigned as one of the most wicked kings of Judah. "Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God."¹² Ahaz placed altars to other gods in the temple and eventually closed the temple doors. He sacrificed at least one of his sons and led Judah to openly worship other gods.

"The LORD had humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had promoted wickedness in Judah and had been most unfaithful to the LORD."¹³ God caused Judah to lose in battle to both the King of Aram and Pekah, King of Israel. These sound defeats led Ahaz into forming an unholy alliance with Tiglath-Pileser, King of Assyria for protection. Though Assyria did not attack Judah, Ahaz was forced to pay a heavy tribute.

When Ahaz died, his son Hezekiah assumed the throne of Judah and immediately instituted reform. "In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them."¹⁴ Hezekiah called the priests and Levites together and said,

¹² 2 Kings 16:2 (New International Version).

¹³ 2 Chronicles 28:19 (New International Version).

¹⁴ 2 Chronicles 29:3 (New International Version).

Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your fathers. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the Lord's dwelling place and turned their backs on him. They also shut the doors of the portico and put out the lamps. They did not burn incense or present any burnt offerings at the sanctuary to the God of Israel. Therefore, the anger of the LORD has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes. This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity. Now I intend to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us. My sons, do not be negligent now, for the LORD has chosen you to stand before him and serve him, to minister before him and to burn incense.¹⁵

Hezekiah instructed the priests to purify the temple and called the people of Israel together to worship the Lord. The people responded and returned to obedience to God and faithful worship. God in turn forgave them and blessed them.

There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the days of Solomon son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place.¹⁶

¹⁵ 2 Chronicles 29:5-11 (New International Version).

¹⁶ 2 Chronicles 30:26-27 (New International Version).

Revival in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the concept of revival changed from a focus on national renewal for Israel into a call for individuals to believe in Christ and turn away from sin. While both John the Baptist and Jesus called all Israel to repent, they taught that only those who chose to do so would experience the blessing of restoration. Each individual was responsible for his or her decision to turn from sin to follow him.

Though there were some who chose to follow Jesus and tried to remain faithful to him, these disciples' level of understanding and consistency proved to be inconsistent until the Day of Pentecost. The events of Pentecost are significant in that the disciples were empowered to live a more faithful life. This set a model of what revivals could look like in this era of the church. The disciples were emboldened to be more effective in spreading the message of salvation and the number of faithful worshipers of God increased rapidly. This early church in Jerusalem had all the earmarks of a genuine revival. Luke records that,

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being

saved.¹⁷

Though the early church appeared to be less turbulent in its struggle with sin, Scripture indicates that some local churches experienced a falling away from God. In the opening chapters of the book of Revelation, Jesus sent messages to seven churches in Asia. To the church in Ephesus, he wrote,

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.¹⁸

This brief survey of the theme of revival through the Scriptures shows that though this has not been the only method by which God has responded to states of spiritual decline, it became the recurring pattern. This process of renewal demonstrates God's mercy and patience with his people. Yet it is not without pain. God typically allows his people to suffer the consequences of not being in relationship with Him to bring them to a state in which they earnestly cry out to him for help.

Understanding Revivals from a Theological Perspective

It is difficult to understand why a revived community would leave a close and loving relationship with God. But a survey of Biblical as well as church history reveals repeated examples of fervent generations eventually reverting to spiritual stagnation. This cycle of decline and revival is best understood when we consider Scripture's teaching on the

¹⁷ Acts 2:41-47 (New International Version).

¹⁸ Revelation 2:4-5 (New International Version).

spiritual dynamics that affect human behavior. There are forces that are influencing human behavior that are not always apparent. Scripture illuminates these influences to be:

- 1) God, working through his Spirit, the Scriptures, and at times godly leaders.
- 2) Satan, working through demonic influence, the corrupted human nature, and the influence of the unredeemed world.
- 3) Our human will, which chooses whether we will submit to God's sovereignty or rebel.

Divine Influence

It would be misleading to suggest that these three influences are equal in power or sway. God is the creator of all things. He is omnipotent, omniscient and in addition to these overwhelming qualities, he is wholly loving. The Bible reveals God's benevolent plan for humanity in the book of Jeremiah,

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."¹⁹

The work of God to revive a church or a community flows from his love for his children and his desire that no one would be separated from him. The Apostle Peter wrote, "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."²⁰

¹⁹ Jeremiah 29:11-13 (New International Version).

²⁰ 2 Peter 3:9 (New International Version).

The Bible also teaches that God is sovereign. David wrote, “The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.”²¹ Jonathan Edwards strongly emphasized the sovereignty of God in his preaching. Describing his personal experience, Edwards believed that it was not until he humbly submitted to this doctrine that he was truly converted. Edwards defined the sovereignty of God as “his absolute, independent right of disposing of all creatures according to his own pleasure.”²²

To support this understanding, he cites occasions where God hardened a person’s heart. God declared to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”²³ Edwards taught that God exercised this right by providing some with the means to be saved while denying it to others. John Calvin expressed a similar view in stating that God’s sovereignty logically extends to the eternal destination of each person’s soul.

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.²⁴

²¹ Psalms 103:19 (New International Version).

²² Jonathan Edwards, “God’s Sovereignty in the Salvation of Men” [sermon on-line]; available from <http://www.jonathanedwards.com/sermons/Doctrine/gssm.htm>; Internet: accessed August 2005.

²³ Exodus 33:19 (New International Version).

²⁴ John Calvin, The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chapter XXI, Section 5, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 568. [on-line] available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.pdf>.

It is clear that God has every power and right to predestine each soul to such an extent, However, such actions do not seem to be consistent with his character. Wesley wrote,

The sovereignty of God is never to supersede his justice. And this is the present objection against unconditional reprobation (the plain consequence of unconditional election). It flatly contradicts, indeed utterly overthrows, the Scripture account of the justice of God.²⁵

One would expect that God's love combined with his sovereignty would result in a continuously obedient and blessed relationship with his creation. This is, unfortunately, not the case. In order to deal with this unexpected reality, it is necessary to develop an understanding of human free will and of the effects of sin without denying God's sovereignty. These concepts will be further developed later in this chapter. Theologians from various camps can agree that God at the minimum strongly influences our individual actions and that the more we submit to God's lordship and sovereignty, the more he is able to influence our lives.

Acknowledging that God strongly influences human actions, we ask, "How does God directs us?" One key way is through the written revelation of Scripture. In the Old Testament, revival was often fueled and guided by the rediscovery of God's law. In more recent revivals, it is a devoted adherence to Scripture that has kept the movement balanced between subjective fanaticism and heresy on one extreme and legalistic

Internet: accessed March 2006.

²⁵ John Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," XXXI, in John Wesley, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 439.

institutionalism on the other. Charles Spurgeon wrote,

To me it is clear that we need a revival of old-fashioned gospel preaching like that of Whitefield and Wesley. The Scriptures must be made the infallible foundation of all teaching; the ruin, redemption and regeneration of mankind must be set forth in unmistakable terms.²⁶

In our current era, the debate over the authority and inerrancy of the Scriptures is critical to our receptivity to revival. Paul wrote to Timothy about the nature and value of Scripture, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”²⁷ Saint Augustine addressed this debate,

I have learned to yield this respect and honour only to the canonical books of Scripture; of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it.²⁸

If we were to abandon this belief and concede that the Bible has errors within it, each one of us become a subjective judge to determine which parts of the Scripture are true

²⁶ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, The Kind Of Revival We Need [essay online]; available from <http://www.spurgeon.org/revival.htm>; Internet: accessed 4 March 2006.

²⁷ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (New International Version).

²⁸ Augustine, “Letters of St. Augustine”, in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume 1, ed. Philip Schaff, Peabody (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 350.

and which are false. Again Augustine wrote,

For it seems to me that most disastrous consequences must follow upon our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books: that is to say, that the men by whom the Scripture has been given to us, and committed to writing, did put down in these books anything false. It is one question whether it may be at any time the duty of a good man to deceive; but it is another question whether it can have been the duty of a writer of Holy Scripture to deceive: nay, it is not another question-it is no question at all. For if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority one false statement as made in the way of duty, there will not be left a single sentence of those books which, if appearing to any one difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away, as a statement in which, intentionally, and under a sense of duty, the author declared what was not true.²⁹

Another key way in which God works to produce a revival is through the influence of godly leaders. Revivals in the Old Testament were dependent on the judge or the king remaining faithful to God. The New Testament church was somewhat less dependent on a single leader, but the role of an apostle was in part to keep the church both orthodox and passionate as it spread beyond Jerusalem.

A study of key historical revivals shows that a key factor has been the godly leadership of men such as Edwards, Wesley, and Finney. While this could be considered human influence, God has so consistently worked in men from the days of the judges that

²⁹ Ibid., 251-252.

this seems to be evidence that God called and equipped these leaders for this special role.

Satanic Influence

The opening chapters of Genesis portray the desired relationship between God and his creation. Adam and Eve lived in obedience and open communion with their Creator. Satan persuaded Eve that God was not looking out for their best interest and that they could be like God if they would disobey his command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As a result of their sin, they were banished from the garden. More importantly, their relationship with God had been critically hindered by sin. Though Satan's role after this was not nearly as apparent, Scripture teaches that he and his demons are constantly battling the faithful with the purpose of destroying them.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.³⁰

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.³¹

The Bible does give the follower of Christ hope that there is power to have victory over Satan through the name of Jesus. If we are abiding in Christ and obediently trusting God, we have a spiritual armor that will protect us from Satan's attempts to derail us. If we neglect to nurture our relationship with God, it is as if we were refusing to put on the

³⁰ Ephesians 6:10-12 (New International Version).

³¹ 1 Peter 5:8 (New International Version).

spiritual armor. This prayerlessness, rather than blatant rebellion from God, is often the first step toward spiritual decline. Once we are vulnerable to Satan's deceptions and attacks, the likelihood of further sin increases.

The sin in the garden had consequences on all those who followed. Paul compares Christ's redemptive effect on those who follow him to Adam's corrupting effect on all who were born after his sin. "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned."³² After the factor of sin entered into the human heart, there was a radical change in human nature, which made Adam and Eve and all their descendants inevitably prone to sin. The degree of this depravity has been debated for centuries. Jonathan Edwards argued that we are born naturally blind to the things of God. So, the "natural man" is neither aware of his condition nor able to move toward God.³³ If this is the depth of the depravity, it is only by the mercy and prevenient grace of God that we would be capable of understanding and accepting the forgiveness he offers us through Jesus' sacrifice.

John Wesley may have had a less devastating appraisal of the damage of sin to the human nature, but sin clearly made all our attempts at justifying ourselves without Christ fruitless.

For our corruption through original sin is so great that all our faith, charity, words and works cannot merit or deserve any part of our justification for us. And

³² Romans 5:12 (New International Version).

³³ Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in The Works of Jonathan Edward, Volume 2, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 7ff.

therefore we thus speak, humbling ourselves to God and giving to our Saviour Christ all the glory of our justification.³⁴

It is after acknowledging our own sinfulness that we can trust completely in the grace of God for our salvation. Wesley preached:

For, what is it more, than to acknowledge, with our heart as well as lips, the true state wherein we are? to acknowledge that we bring with us into the world a corrupt, sinful nature; more corrupt, indeed, than we can easily conceive, or find words to express? that hereby we are prone to all that is evil, and averse from all that is good; that we are full of pride, self will, unruly passions, foolish desires, vile and inordinate affections; lovers of the world, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God? that our lives have been no better than our hearts, but many ways ungodly and unholy; insomuch that our actual sins, both in word and deed, have been as the stars of heaven for multitude; that, on all these accounts, we are displeasing to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and deserve nothing from him but indignation and wrath and death, the due wages of sin? that we cannot, by any of our righteousness, (for indeed we have none at all,) nor by any of our works, (for they are as the tree upon which they grow,) appease the wrath of God, or avert the punishment we have justly deserved; yea, that, if left to ourselves, we shall only wax worse and worse, sink deeper and deeper into sin, offend God more and more, both with our evil works, and with the evil tempers of

³⁴ John Wesley, "The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith and Good Works, Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England," in John Wesley ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 128.

our carnal mind, till we fill up the measure of our iniquities, and bring upon ourselves swift destruction? And is not this the very state wherein by nature we are?³⁵

Wesley saw the work of God, dramatically evident in the revival, as capable of providing victory over these satanic influences. Not that we would ever become immune to temptation. We will all occasionally fail. Yet in a revived state, God would have such control over our lives that we would intend to live a holy life and could love God with a pure love.

When Wesley visited the revived Moravians in Herrnhut, he wrote,

And here I continually met with what I sought for, viz. Living proofs of the power of faith: persons saved from inward as well as outward sin by ‘the love of God shed abroad in their hearts,’ and from all doubt and fear by the abiding witness of ‘the Holy Ghost given unto them.’³⁶

The Free Will of Humanity

If it were only these two forces of God’s benevolent power and Satan’s destructive but limited work, God would clearly prevail and the human race would constantly abide in an Eden-like intimacy with God. The third factor in the equation is the human dynamic. God commanded Adam and Eve, “You are free to eat from any tree in the

³⁵ John Wesley, “The Righteousness of Faith” in Sermons on Several Occasions, Sermon 6, 55 [sermon on-line]; available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.html>; Internet: accessed 04 March 2006.

³⁶John Wesley (Journal, Thursday, July 6, 1738) in John Wesley ed. Albert C. Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 13.

garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."³⁷ Nonetheless, when the serpent tempted them, they both disobeyed and ate the fruit of the tree.

There are two possible explanations for how a sovereign, omnipotent God could be disobeyed. Either God caused them to sin or he restrained His power to allow Adam and Eve to choose whether or not to obey. Because it seems incompatible with God's benevolent nature to force such non-compliance, it seems apparent that humanity was and is free to choose to either obey or disobey God. They are consequently held accountable for their decisions.

In addition, Scripture clearly states in James 1:13 that God does not tempt anyone to sin. "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone."

Augustine wrote about this free will,

Now He has revealed to us, through His Holy Scriptures, that there is in a man a free choice of will. But how He has revealed this I do not recount in human language, but in divine. There is, to begin with, the fact that God's precepts themselves would be of no use to a man unless he had free choice of will, so that by performing them he might obtain the promised rewards. For they are given that no one might be able to plead the excuse of ignorance, as the Lord says concerning the Jews in the gospel: 'if I had not come and spoken unto them, they

³⁷ Genesis 2:16-17 (New International Version).

would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.’ (John 15:22)³⁸

It would be a further extension of this freedom of will to suggest that a sinful person, when confronted with the message of Christ’s salvation would also have the choice to either receive the good news and accept the salvation offered or to reject the message and continue as before. This belief is central to revival theology. Whether approaching this from a Calvinistic or Arminian theology, there is a common belief in the need for a personal conversion. Edwards wrote of the complexity of this issue when he stated,

In efficacious grace we are not merely passive, nor yet does God do some, and we do the rest. But God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what he produces, viz. our own acts. God is the only proper author and fountain; we only are the proper actors. We are, in different respects, wholly passive and wholly active.³⁹

To say that every human has the freedom to sin or to obey, to receive the gospel message or to reject it does not imply that everyone has an equal opportunity. Our environment influences us. A person born into a Christian family in the United States is much more likely to become a Christian than a person born in a restrictive Muslim country. To suggest that God does not have the right to provide greater opportunity for grace to one person than to another would be to resist God’s sovereignty.

This is applicable to the development of a revival theology because much of the

³⁸ Augustine, “On Grace and Free Will” in Basic Writings of Saint Augustine, Volume 1, ed. Whitney J. Oates (New York: Random House Publishers, 1948), 734.

³⁹ Jonathan Edwards, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman (Carlisle, Pennsylvania: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 557.

discussion of how a revival is begun is the same as the discussion of how an individual is brought to salvation. In our corporate rebellion and sin, we are incapable of working enough good to produce a spiritual revival. We are hopelessly inept. But by God's mercy and prevenient grace, he calls and equips us to be able to do the things which are required to humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face and repent. We can resist God and continue to live in an un-revived state. We can cease to pray or continue casually in our sin and hinder God's desire to revive our hearts or our church. But if we seek God wholeheartedly and rely on his strength, we can do whatever God asks us to do.

Catalytic Factors for Revival

If human activity does influence the emergence of revival, it is appropriate to ask what actions are most effective. I assert that these keys are discovered in Scripture and confirmed through the study of church history. In each revival, a number of factors could be listed as being causative to the genesis of the revival. Some are significant factors. Others are merely cultural coincidences to the occurrence of revival.

The study of church history must be combined with the reliable truth of Scripture and the reasoning of Biblical theology to separate causative factors from mere superstition. Once, an elderly preacher suggested to me that the reason we are not experiencing revival today is that I am not using the King James Version of the Bible. The revivals he experienced in his childhood all used that translation.

The primary scripture that addresses this issue has already been cited. It is God's promise to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14,

When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my

name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (New International Version)

This passage declares four behaviors that God gives as conditions upon which he would grant his healing to a wayward people. Humility and seeking God's face are changes in attitude. Prayer and turning from wickedness are changes in behavior, which result from those changes in the heart. A heart that is not humble views prayer as a waste of time and is resistant to admitting its sinfulness. A life that does not seek the face of God will not be quiet to hear his convicting message. When all four aspects are present, one's heart is restored to a loving relationship with God and is open to being used to bring about a revival.