

## Revising Revival – Sample

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Dr. Stephen R. Crosby

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Someone once said that the simplest propositions are normally the cleverest . . . and usually wrong. Salvation is so simple a four-year old can understand the essentials. However, properly handling the Scriptures is not quite so simple. Good wine results from properly tended grapes. Before I try to squeeze out some New Covenant wine from 2 Chronicles 7:14, I need to address some grape handling issues.

### Devotion and Doctrine

The Person of the Holy Spirit inhabits and administrates the Scriptures. In a personalized devotional sense, He can quicken diverse applications of a passage unto a believer. However, a devotionally moving application is not automatically suitable for pulpit<sup>1</sup> presentation. Most preachers like to minister the Word from a sense of inspiration. That's fine. However, it's a mistake to preach subjective devotional applications as universal doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Here are some simple examples of what I mean:

The Spirit of God could legitimately quicken the story of Paul's Macedonian call to a believer in a way of personal application about his/her own life's calling. However, next Sunday it would not be legitimate to preach that if we really loved the Lord wholeheartedly, the "right thing to do" would be to quit our jobs and fulfill our calling as missionaries to the world. An exciting personal call to action does not necessarily apply universally.

The Welsh Revival<sup>3</sup> was one of the greatest in the modern era. It was distinguished by unique Holy Spirit manifestations and subjective experiences. Regrettably, the revival was short-lived and derailed into cultishness. Near the end of his life Evan Roberts, the individual most associated with the movement, is reported to have said: "*Oh, that I had taught them doctrine.*" When unique manifestations happen, we get to enjoy them. We just can't build with them and shouldn't structure for them.

I once heard a Christian recording artist say how thankful she was for the ministry God had given her of taking people into the Lord's presence. It's one thing for a gifted musician to facilitate our singing as we corporately experience the Lord's Presence when we gather. However, there's no such ministry as an "official-taker-into-the-Presence-person." Pentecost changed everything. We have direct access to the Lord's Presence through Christ's work, not the song leader's. We can legitimately experience Christ in each other in a covenant community via mutual gift exchange done in love, but there are no Presence-brokers in the New Covenant era.

The New Covenant teaches that His Presence is in the hearts of His people.<sup>4</sup> What were inhabited praises of the Old Covenant became inhabited hearts in the New. I am in Him, and He is in me.<sup>5</sup> I'm always in His Presence abiding,<sup>6</sup> regardless of what the song leader may or may not do.<sup>7</sup> Jesus said obedience,<sup>8</sup> not singing, was the key to His manifest presence. Jesus said those that are His have already been given the glory of God.<sup>9</sup> They don't have to sing for it on Sunday, and no one other than Jesus brokers it. I sing for joy because I'm always in His Presence, not to create His Presence.

These revealed propositional Truths stand regardless of what we might feel, or not feel, and regardless of what we do in the first hour of our typical worship services.<sup>10</sup> The young lady's subjective

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term "pulpit" as a metaphor for the public proclamation of the Scriptures requiring belief and behavior conformity.

<sup>2</sup> Biblical teaching that requires universal conformity of beliefs and actions.

<sup>3</sup> Early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:19; Ephesians 3:17

<sup>5</sup> John 14:20; 17:23

<sup>6</sup> John 15:1-7

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:20; John 14:17; Ephesians 2:6; and many others.

<sup>8</sup> John 14:21

<sup>9</sup> John 17:22 - The glory that you have given me, I *have given* them (Greek past tense).

<sup>10</sup> Ravi Zacharias speaks of a theology of feeling and experience that is sweeping the Western Church as it rejects, or waters down the claims of propositional revelation in Scripture. The consumeristic, demographic, market-driven, and Charismatic Churches in the land are sinking deeper and deeper into Gnosticism and either do not realize it or do not care.

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experience is irrelevant to these truths. Her understanding is at least inadequate and perhaps worse. Inspiration doesn't supplant doctrine.

In many local churches, subjectivism and thrill have supplanted doctrinal discipline. When insecurity-based, anti-education, and anti-intellectual bias is at work in the same environments, aberrant beliefs and practices easily become normalized.

If our desire for subjective experiences and inspirational thrills exceeds our sobriety concerning the implications of the preached Word, we are in very dangerous waters. The Scriptures can be made into anything that suits us when taught or applied out of context. All Scripture, especially Old Testament passages, must pass through the filter of the Christ-Act<sup>11</sup> and the New Covenant before being taught as doctrine. If we are not diligent in this regard, Old Covenant (Mosaic) value systems and methodologies can easily be imported into the local church. For example, consider David's life. David's life is not our pattern. Christ's is. David points us to Christ, not to David. The unfortunate result of out-of-context and much inspirational preaching is that decent and well-meaning individuals often teach nonsense, typological fantasies, Old Covenant bondage, and worse.

I like to ask some simple questions in congregations around the world when I am with them:

1. "How many of you have prayed this prayer (2 Chr. 7:14) at some time in your Christian experience?" Nearly every hand goes up.
2. "How many of you have seen your communities revived?" No hands go up—zero.<sup>12</sup> This is not just my individual experience, but a common, Western Body of Christ-wide experience.

I then ask a third question:

1. "How many of you have ever heard this verse preached in its context?" So far, without exception, no hands go up.

This is a problem. We base our revival theology and practice on a verse that: a) no one has ever heard taught in context, and b) no one has ever seen work. I find this troubling.

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<sup>11</sup> The birth, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and glorification of the Lord; and the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>12</sup> I am aware of claims of citywide revivals through certain ministries associated with "Transformations." This is not the place to critique these reports other than to say that objective investigation has shown that not all are what they have been presented to be.