

Twenty-four Questions to Ask In the Face of Apparent Revival

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Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible.

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When revival comes, it will be a very fragile blessing, a blessing that will need to be handled with great care. Human failure to rightly handle this fragile blessing from God has often, in the past, kept revival from producing its highest and best possible results.

In a very lovely sense, the nature of a revival is all eyes on God. All Satan has to do to destroy a revival is to get the eyes off God to someone or something: to you, to me, to some stupid thing you or I do, to some ridiculous viewpoint proclaimed, even to some truth overly stressed and turned into a divisive issue. Satan has at his fingertips hundreds and thousands of means by which he can draw the attention away from Christ. Whether the attention turns to you or to me, to some phenomena, to aberrant doctrine, to some overemphasis upon a good truth--it matters not what eyes turn to--when eyes are off the Savior, the revival diminishes and soon ceases.

Thus it is urgent that we prepare ourselves for revival by discerning, as best we can, the nature of true revival and avoiding, at all costs, those disruptive and harmful factors that Satan is known to use in minimizing the good effects of the work of God in revival.

The following pages list twenty-four questions to ask in the face of apparent revival. While a single worrisome answer does not automatically negate the movement's validity, how many of the twenty-four questions have to turn up negative before we are alarmed? If twenty-one things are positive and three are negative, would that settle the issue? Could we do this merely on a majority vote? Remember, this is a series of tests to be used in seasons of religious excitement. If a single answer comes out negative, that should strike alarm. It will not enable us to pass as final judgement, but it must alert us to caution and make us ready at any time to say, "Stop in the name of the Lord!"

I plead with you to face with the greatest possible solemnity and care the following questions.

1. Is there a biblical warrant for all that is going on in the name of revival?

With the help of some little speck of information somewhere in the Bible or church history, one could conceivably claim support for almost any kind of experience. But instead

of searching for support for our experience, we should be asking, “Is there a biblical warrant for this? Is it something taught in the Bible? Is it something commanded in the Bible? Is it something required in the Bible? Is it something urged in the Bible?”

There is no danger that eyes will be turned away from the Savior when we stick with the things the Bible requires, but if we allow anything that has no biblical warrant, we immediately endanger the work of God.

Obviously, in order to successfully do this, we must have a thorough understanding of what the Bible does warrant. Therefore, in preparation for revival, we need to give ourselves to the discovery of the mind of God throughout Scripture so that we will be capable of testing things as they occur.

We also need to face the fact that the Scriptures do require us to test things and to judge them righteously (First John 4:1; John 7:24). In other words, we must discern if a thing is right or wrong, good or bad, according to the standards laid out for us in Scripture. Many seem to think that all judging is forbidden by God, quoting the “Judge not” of Matthew 7:1-5. They forget that the remainder of that passage demands that we judge righteously because, if we judge unrighteously, we can anticipate unrighteous judgement upon ourselves. We are not forbidden to judge but are required to judge. “He who is spiritual appraises all things” (I Corinthians 2:15a). In a time of revival, every person ought to be prepared to judge whether or not what is occurring has biblical warrant. Don’t allow anything to be called revival or to continue as revival that is not warranted in the Bible.

2. Is what is happening in harmony with the whole tone of Scripture?

In past (as well as present) movements that some have dared to call revivals, people have roared like lions, barked like dogs, rolled in the aisles like circus clowns, jerked as if taken by Saint Vitus’s Dance and laughed as if God were funny and sin an amusement. There have also been some offshoots of true revivals that have majored on such unusual activity. Does the tone of Scripture suggest that it is in the mind and heart of God that His children conduct themselves in this fashion and credit it to a mighty working of His Holy Spirit? You might find somewhere, either in Scripture or in history, a record of someone behaving like a beast or lunatic, but who would dare to suggest that the tone of Scripture is that we behave in such a manner? When some strange spirit is moving among us or some strange fire is burning in our midst, we may let ourselves go and bark like dogs, but surely we must not credit such conduct to God. Thus I am urging this second question to be made part of your thinking even before God begins to stir and before you sense something of the wind of God’s Spirit in the air. Then, whenever there are signs of His manifest presence, be constantly asking concerning all effects, “Is this in keeping with the whole tone of the Word of God?” If you have to do nimble and novel exegesis to support it biblically, look out! You are involved in bringing down the kingdom of God and destroying the work of our Savior.

3. Is the Bible prominently and faithfully preached and taught, taking on even greater prominence as the movement progresses?

The preaching of the Word of God is the primary tool God has given us for the salvation of the lost and for the growth and development of the people of God in the ways of Christ. Every movement that is lacking in solid biblical preaching is to be held in suspicion. Every event that overshadows the bold preaching of great doctrines of faith is immediately questionable. Souls do not thrive on thrills, but evil does. Soul prosperity is immediately related to the proclamation of the entire counsel of God.

How long must preaching be absent or held in low esteem before we judge the matter? How many days does it take to know that something isn't of God? Does it take a year and a half? Why, in the first meeting, if the preaching of the Word of God is not prominent, then you should raise serious questions about it. If three days slip by and the leaders haven't turned to serious, accurate, biblical preaching, stand up in judgement against what is happening, In all the history of the church, there is no more needed or wonderful time for preaching than in a time of revival. Failure here is of the greatest possible consequences.

4. Is what is happening Godlike?

Is it really in keeping with what God has revealed about Himself? Every genuine revival has indeed been Godlike. What is the most prominent effect of revival? Obviously, holiness! In a genuine revival, an awesome sense of conviction of sin settles upon people to the point where they cry out in some fashion, "Woe is me! I am undone! I am a man of unclean lips, of an impure heart!" There is a depth of repentance in revival which does not occur in normal times, and that depth of repentance results in glorious new holiness. Now that is Godlike! But is laughing when the crucifixion of Christ is described Godlike? Is rolling in the aisle Godlike? Is being taken with jerks Godlike? Is shaking and vibrating Godlike? Is falling on the floor foaming at the mouth Godlike? If those things are Godlike, what god are we talking about? Certainly it is not the God of the Bible.

5. If Christ were here in the flesh now, would He be doing it?

Jesus said, "I do nothing on my own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father has taught me. And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him" (John 8:28b-29). Every revival ought to have nothing in it but what Christ Himself would be doing if He were here in the flesh. The believer's great privilege is to be more and more Christ-like. In a season of true revival, God's children make rapid advances in Christ-likeness, not in foolishness, not in absurd conduct, not in that which leaves the world laughing, but in that which shows the Savior. Does

anything show the Savior more greatly than our love, and isn't love one of the blessed and immediate benefits of true revival?

We ought to ask at least some of these questions even when we are not in the midst of revival. Some of you who are struggling over forms of worship and style of ministry would do well to ask the question, "Is this something our Savior would do?" Of one thing you can be absolutely sure, you can't go wrong if you preach the Gospel.

In appraising a work of revival, I must ask, "If Christ were here in the flesh, would He be doing it?" If He would, I will say, "YES!" If He would not, I will say, "NO! Stop all the nonsense!" It is our responsibility to keep all eyes on the Lord, not on that which the Lord Himself would not do if He were here in the flesh.

6. Does whatever is happening draw attention to Christ or to itself or to the person or persons who are doing it?

We understand that the nature of revivals is such that emotions are stirred at very deep levels. Emotions do need stirring, but people whose emotions are stirred can be subject to foolish conduct as well as godly help. And you can help them by observing with care, does what is occurring draw attention to itself or does it draw attention to someone or something? In the early days of the eighteenth century revival in England, there were women who were falling into faints or trances. George Whitefield announced that any woman thus affected would be carried out of the meeting. Do you know what happened? The women ceased the practice. Do you wonder why? I don't mean this disrespectfully but perhaps they were nosey. Maybe they did not want to miss what was going on. Apparently, they were also proud. Not only does phenomena draw attention to itself, but it also draws attention to those who experience it. If the subjects of it becomes the phenomena, you know it isn't of God because that which is of God always draws attention to Christ. He becomes the subject of conversation. He becomes the center of focus.

When revival comes, be sure that nothing is allowed to draw the focus away from Christ. If you see some person doing something that is drawing attention to himself, stop him right then and there, You may say, "I'm too timid to do that." Well, thank God it isn't too late to repent. Timidity is to be repented of. It is true that you should speak in love, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1), but part of the preparation for revival is shedding timidity and becoming as courageous as Daniel.

7. Is this occurrence producing both immediate and permanent good?

It would be most unwise to pretend that all that happens in a season of revival is of God. Surely Satan stirs himself to activity at such a time and is very clever at tricking Christians. Is he likely to do so by making them feel badly? Will he accomplish anything by making you feel spiritually worse than you did before you became the focus of his

attention? No! If he wants to trick you, he will make you feel spiritually good but with no lasting results.

Is there value in conviction of sin that does not result in genuine repentance and faith? Ought we to be excited about religious emotions that leave their subject the way they were beforehand? What if the whole world is stirred with religious thoughts, but it continues in its way of wickedness? That which is of God is of permanent consequence.

8. Is there anything about this occurrence that advances the kingdom of darkness?

Is it a mixed blessing? Does it excite some spiritually while it divides others? Does it strengthen one portion of the flock of God while destroying another? Can the forces of evil secretly rejoice in anything that is occurring, while, at the same time, the lovers of righteousness are blessing God in the name of revival? God's blessings are not mixed. You'll never find God sending anything that is somewhat good and somewhat evil.

Many events that seemed to be productive of some good have grievously divided churches. Obviously, a church that is made up of believers and unbelievers will probably divide over revival, but what is to be said about a work that divides true brother from true brother? Christ's heart calls for His people to be one (John 17). Jude makes it clear that those that cause divisions are devoid of the Spirit (verse 19). Therefore we can be sure that a divisive movement is not of God but rather an occasion for the devil to celebrate.

9. Is repentance among believers one of the leading characteristics?

How could any experience be called true revival if it does not produce conviction of sin leading to genuine repentance? God has made it crystal clear that His will for His people is their sanctification (First Thessalonians 4:3) and has warned us severely that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14). If there is only joy or rapturous feelings and no repentance, is the experience a recovery of the holiness God expects? Can people come out of spiritual apathy, mean-spiritedness, worldliness, lust or pride without dying to it? Can a forward step of obedience be taken which is not first founded on an utter rejection and hatred of the sin being replaced? Repentance has been a key mark of every true revival. God is not likely to reward unrepentant people with an increased blessing.

10. Is there a history of such occurrences that serves as a warning against them?

Tragically, some of us cannot answer that question because we don't know enough about history to draw such lessons. I encourage you to read extensively the glorious works of God in revival. Such historical books as "Scotland Saw His Glory" and "Glory Filled the Land," both edited by Richard Owen Roberts and "Revival and Revivalism" by Ian H.

Murray are very helpful, as are the great “Lectures on the Revival of Religion” by Ministers of the Church of Scotland. History has much to teach us.

Much of the questionable physical phenomena that has occurred in recent religious settings was also experienced in the past. Men of discernment were then quick to say, “This is not of God.” But today's tendency is to say, “Let’s wait and see.” But why should we wait and see? We already know it is not of God. We know the last time it happened what the end result was. Must we resist history and learn afresh all the calamitous things ourselves, or will we let ourself be made wise by the experiences of our forefathers and will we keep revival on track with all eyes on God by saying, “This happened before and the end results were bad, therefore, we forbid it”? A people that will not learn from their past are doomed to repeat many of the errors of their fathers.

11. Does it need to be worked up by human action or emotions, or is it prompted by God’s Spirit?

A great deal of what we do in church right now is worked up and is therefore under a cloud of suspicion to begin with. In a season of revival you can be very sure that anything that has to be worked up is not of God. Those things that God Himself does are not produced by human coercion or suggestion. God uses men to preach the gospel, to call sinners to repentance, and to exhort them to holiness; but the power and conviction and conversions that occur are from God. A congregation can be told to stand and stomp their feet, or can be given suggestive hints of desired or expected response “to the Spirit,” and all their actions be void of God’s prompting.

12. Is what is happening subject to human control?

Do you remember what I told you about the meetings in Whitefield’s day when he forbade swoons or faints and they ceased? When a leader can say, “Stop all the noise and nonsense,” and it stops, it is evident that its origin is of man and not of God. Sainly Andrew Murray tried to take control of the work of the Holy Spirit in his church in South Africa but quickly discovered that the work of God is greater than even the most loved and respected of pastors. A phenomena, an occurrence, an event that is subject to ordering and can be told to cease is not of God. This is not to say that godly leadership cannot lead under the Spirit’s direction but that the substance of what is occurring in true revival is not humanly controllable. This is God at work! Repentance will continue, brokenness will increase, the spirit of prayer will go on mounting up, exaltation of God will surge forward if God is visiting His people—no matter what instructions are given. Some of us have been in meetings where God has come and after prolonged seasons we have sought to interrupt and have commanded the people to stop and to go home, but we might as well have gone

outside and spoken those words to a fire hydrant. When God is in the midst of His people, He is in charge.

13. Are the first and primary subjects women?

You may be shocked at my nerve in asking this, but it is an urgent question. God has been pleased to use women in a glorious way in times of revival. Lady Huntington was intensely involved in the Great Awakening through hosting and funding several prominent leaders in the movement (Whitefield, Wesley, etc.) and by generally supporting the work of God. But there is great need of asking the question, are women leading out in this movement or activity, or are those primarily affected by phenomena women of girls? We don't dare lose sight of the fact that Eve was first deceived (First Tim. 2:14) and that women on the whole are more inclined to be led astray by false teaching or spurious religious activity. Whenever there is a stirring of what is hoped to be the Holy Spirit, we ought to watch for who are the first and primary subjects of what is going on. If they are women, or more especially young women or girls, we should be very cautious.

14. Does what is happening produce an elitist mentality—the “haves” and the “have-nots”?

When something occurs in the realm of religion that causes some to think they have “it” and others do not, beware. Spiritual pride is very dangerous, and it is never of God. A study of the Welsh Revival of 1904-05 clearly demonstrates that one of its great weaknesses was this “have/have-nots” mentality in which subjects of the revival thought of themselves as superior to others. Some of those who thought of themselves as “the children of the revival” grew very suspicious of other Welsh believers who came to Christ in non-revival circumstances. Part of the decline that followed 1905 was that failure to resist the tendency to think of subjects of the revival as superior to others. Exercise great caution here.

15. Is what is happening something that unbelievers, cults, false religions, and other non-Christians have experienced or practiced?

While it may be troubling to some, it is nevertheless true that even such manifestations as miracles of healing, gifts, tongues, and resurrections from the dead are reported by cults like Mormons and others. This doesn't automatically prove these things are not of God, but it ought to lessen any blind enthusiasm for such phenomena when we realize they are not exclusively Christian. If unbelievers have or are experiencing such things, a great flag of suspicion should be raised in our minds over what is going on. In contrast, is being brought to a deep and a permanent level of genuine repentance and faith

something that unbelievers experience? No, indeed it is not! Is falling in love with Christ and embracing everything that God desires us to be something the cultist specializes in? Is it not clear that there are certain things that are obviously and distinctly of God—absolutely and exclusively Christian? Then let us focus on them instead of on things in which the unbelievers can and do participate.

16. Can unbelievers participate in this with no permanent alteration in their spiritual condition?

Every revival carries in its wake some deceived people, who experience excitement without real change. But, in the main, the nature of true revival is such that the counterfeit is discovered and rejected. One can exhilarate with unequaled joy in the midst of a religious uproar and live like the devil thereafter. He can be taken with the greatest of religious fervor, practicing it all incessantly for seven weeks, and still live in the depth of iniquity. But you cannot repent and believe and remain unchanged, and repenting and believing is what true revival is about. So ask the question, “On the whole, are unbelievers able to participate continuously in this event with no permanent alteration spiritually?” If they are, reject this so-called revival—it cannot be of God.

17. Can the Holy Spirit be grieved by what is happening?

We must not err in supposing that the only time the Holy Spirit is grieved is when there is gross sin. The Holy Spirit is also grieved when the believer’s conduct is foolish, God’s great intention in revival is to bring a wayward people back to Himself. If we allow the focus to be on feelings or experiences, we will most certainly grieve the Holy Spirit.

Scriptures teach that the Holy Spirit is not merely power or a force or an inanimate object but a person. As a person, He can be offended and driven away. In revival we must continually guard against that which has the potential of driving the Spirit of God away.

18. Does what is happening, generate confusion in the local assembly of the children of God and abroad?

I am not asking if the world is confused. At the day of Pentecost unbelievers came rushing, asking if God’s children had gone mad or if they were drunk. The question to be asked is, are the saints, the children of God, the lovers of Jesus, confused by what is going on? The Holy Spirit is not the author of confusion. When the true church is in continual confusion in the midst of a spiritual activity, it is not of God. When the Holy Spirit bows God’s people down in brokenness and contrition over sin, it does not confuse them; but much of what goes on in the name of revival does.

19. Are the leaders godly men and are they in subjection to other godly men, or are they a law unto themselves?

The Bible tells us, "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." Godly men know the great wisdom and the urgent necessity of being open at all times to other leaders of God's work. In times of revival this general need of counselors is vastly greater than normal.

There are two issues here I would warn you about: First, if you are in a movement where the leaders are not openly seeking the counsel and guidance of godly men outside their own fellowship, beware. Second, do not let some superstitious viewpoint prevent you from giving and receiving counsel yourself. A great tragedy happened during the 1904-05 Welsh Revival. Evan Roberts, a primary leader, was young and, in certain critical ways, unwise. The older, wiser, and more godly men of the principality, of whom there were at least a few, should have gathered around him as counselors. They should have urged him to commit himself to them in accountability, and in doing so they could have protected both Evan Roberts and the work of God in the revival. Instead, a most unwise slogan seemed to prevail: "Touch not the Lord's anointed." In consequence, Evan's own conduct became increasingly erratic, and before long he was removed from the revival, apparently suffering some form of severe breakdown. The revival itself was relatively short-lived, and much that needed to happen failed. When the Spirit of God begins to move among us, prepare yourself to become a counselor and guide to whomever God makes the leader--become one who will stand with him to keep him from error. If ever a leader needs others to hold him accountable, it is when the spirit of revival descends. And if the leadership resists counsel and will not bring themselves under the authority of others in accountability, regard what they are and what they are doing as not of God.

20. Does this experience so reveal the glory of God that the angels in heaven can rejoice?

Before we can really appreciate this question, some of us may need to face squarely the issue of rejoicing over and boasting in converts that the angels know nothing about. We ought not to consider anybody converted until we have reason to believe that songs have been provoked in heaven over them (Luke 15:10). If the angels of God, who are surrounding the throne and singing His praise, see no reasons to rejoice about what is happening on earth, we have no reason to rejoice either. For just as surely as the hosts of heaven are filled with joy when a single sinner repents, we can be sure that there is great rejoicing indeed when sinners come to Christ by the tens of thousands!

How can we know when the angels are rejoicing? Their primary occupation pertains to the glory of God. When the church on earth is fully engaged in the same task as the angels in heaven, we can be sure there will be rejoicing among the heavenly hosts.

21. Does what is happening focus on the physical and temporal or on the spiritual and eternal?

I'm not personally interested in any religious happening that merely affects people physically, but oh, how my soul craves that which fills it with greater love toward the Savior; oh, how believers hunger for that which brings their blessed God nearer; oh, how we long for holiness! As a young boy I caught something of a vision of the beauty of holiness, discovering that nothing else compares with it. A revival that brings holiness is what I crave; and I assume, rightly I hope, that you crave it also. But if what is happening is focused on time and not eternity, on the body but not the spirit, I am not interested. The news that I live to hear is not that everybody around you is dancing or leaping or shouting but that they have repented of all sin and are worshiping obediently at Christ's feet.

22. Does what is happening demonstrate a true inward change of affections?

The very essence of sin is self. It is me versus God and me versus you. If that which we are calling revival is genuine, if it is truly of God, it is going to produce an inward change of affections which enables one to cease loving himself and to begin gloriously loving God and others. The change it produces in affections will not be temporary but permanent. I urge you to be very wary of any religious event that does not produce this permanent change of affections. If you have not read Jonathan Edwards' "Religious Affections," do so soon.

23. Is what is happening the primary thing you want your children and your children's children to experience?

I have been blessed not only with children but with grandchildren. Just as I have aspirations for my children, so also I have aspirations for the grandchildren. In praying for my descendants, I have never prayed, "Oh, God, please, let the day come soon when they roar like lions, jerk like idiots, bark like dogs, laugh like hyenas, and roll in the aisles like prostitutes and drunken men." No, No! The primary thing I have yearned for concerning my children and grandchildren is that they be holy men and women of God. If what is happening is not something that I long for subsequent generations to know and experience, then I should eliminate it now. Why should I waste time upon it? When we are talking about holiness, when we are talking about love of Jesus, when we are talking about utter

and total devotion to the Savior, then I say, yes! That's what I want for my children, my grandchildren, and every generation to come!

24. Do the oldest and the most experienced and godliest men in the kingdom of Christ sanction it, or would they if they knew about it?

When revivals occur, there is usually some opposition, but it isn't from the oldest and the most godly and experienced men in the kingdom. Opposition normally stems from those whose own kingdoms are shaken by the true work of God. When the arrogant in heart see their own ministries disrupted, they fight against revival because they really care nothing about God's work.

Consider a common occurrence in revivals. The younger men get out of hand and begin toward excesses. They may even say to the old men, "You sit in the corner and be still. The people are tired of listening to you and want to hear from some of us who have the fire. We are going to run things now." We should entertain continual doubt about anything from which the godly, experienced, older men are ejected.