

## Revival's Call to Radical Repentance

Written by David Wise

Sunday, 29 September 2019 15:37 -

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*“Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways.” (Haggai 1:7)*

In America, we want the “effects” of revival without the uncomfortable and life rearranging “causes” of revival. We all want to see new converts come to the truth, baptisms, churches growing, even churches being planted; we all want to see the effects of revival. However, we are unwilling to deeply and intimately evaluate the areas of our life that need to change and repent of the actions that initiate such a revival. Radical repentance – not just casually feeling sorry for some of our actions but radical, life rearranging changes in our lives – is one of the great causes of revival that we are unwilling to undertake. **THERE IS NO REVIVAL WITHOUT RADICAL REPENTANCE.**

When Paul was in Ephesus, the Lord made it evident that “a great door and effectual is opened unto me” and thus he desired to remain in Ephesus longer (1 Cor. 16:8-9), as long as it was clear that door was still effectually open. God did a great work in Ephesus; so great, that Paul ended up staying in Ephesus for three years, much longer than any other of his church establishment trips. The effects of sincere and authentic revival from this great effectual open door were profoundly evident during Paul’s three years of ministry there. Look at two aspects of the “radical repentance” that were exhibited in the revival in Ephesus.

First, there were many people who used to perform “curious arts”, or witchcraft, that believed and were converted to the truth. However, they didn’t just believe and decide we are not going to engage in our former sinful actions anymore. No, they took the “amazingly radical” step to bring all their former books of witchcraft (that were cumulatively worth over 50,000 pieces of silver) and burn those books (Acts 19:18-19). They didn’t take the “financially prudent” step to sell off all their former books and use the profits for good deeds and maybe even alms for the poor. No, they were so repulsed by their former sin that they could not stand to look at that

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token of their former life of unrepentance so much that they felt compelled to burn books that could have given them an amazing amount of financial gain. That is a radical step – a necessary radical step of repentance that is always evident in fervent revival.

Second, also in Ephesus, there were so many people converted to the worship of the true and living God that the graven image industry was going bankrupt in town (Acts 19:23-41).

Demetrius, a silversmith who was essentially the local leader of the craftsmen trade union who (like many of his counterparts) had gotten rich from selling false idols in the temple of Diana, calls a meeting of the local tradesman. In his speech he says, *“Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover, ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth”*

(Acts 19:25-27). Let's let the gravity of this radical repentance in Ephesus and all of Asia sink in. Not just in Ephesus, but in the entire region (not just in Starkville, but in the entire state of Mississippi for example), that so many people were being converted to the truth and displaying the radical repentance of totally forsaking the false idol worship of Diana that not only were the graven image craftsmen industry in the entire region almost out of a job but the temple of Diana was almost totally vacant for false worship! Wow, praise God!

No revival or repentance is complete until it revolutionizes our pocket book – until it radically changes our finances and spending habits. If we were to see authentic radical repentance in America, I believe our graven image industries would go out of business too. Now, I believe I'm safe in presuming that no one I know is going home at night and worshipping a little bronze statue of Diana or some other false god. But just because we do not worship silver images of a false gods, don't foolishly think we do not worship graven images and false idols. There is no new thing under the sun, and be assured, we all worship false gods and graven images today as well; they have just taken a different form and shape in 21st century America than they did in 1st century Asia and Ephesus.

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Worship means “to ascribe worth unto”. What do we “ascribe worth unto” in our lives? Furthermore, what do we “ascribe the MOST WORTH unto” in our lives? For the Christian, we should ascribe worth solely unto God because Christ alone is worthy to be praised. The first of the ten commandments of the Old Testament is: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”*. The second commandment flows out of the first: *“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image”* (Exod. 20:3-5). God is jealous over his glory, and since we have been redeemed and bought back from sin by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, God demands (he does not suggest, he demands) that he be sole source of worship and priority and praise in the lives of his redeemed. Anything short of that is sin. Anything that detracts or distracts us from total devotion to God in our lives in “another god” that has been taken hold in our heart. Jesus reaffirmed this requirement of total devotion to God in the greatest commandment of the New Testament: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment”* (Matt. 22:37).

If there is anything in our lives that prevents us from single-hearted, single-souled, and single-minded devotion to Christ, God calls upon us to repent and purge that idol of another god from our hearts and then ultimately our lives. That’s why those converted from witchcraft in Ephesus couldn’t just keep those sinful books on their bookshelves but felt compelled to burn them, even to their own financial loss. They realized they had a sin in their lives, and that dross needed to be burned away by fire. If we examine our lives and see that there is something that is detracting us from total devotion to Christ, it is an idol that needs to be purged away. If we view that thing as having “too much value or worth” to us to get rid of it, then we have just ascribed that thing as of “more worth than Christ”. It has too much worth to me to part with this thing. That is the definition of false worship (attributing false worth to something other than God), idolatry, and willful breaking of the first and greatest commandment.

So do we have idols in America today? Let me ask you this and you can answer honestly for yourself. Is there something that God’s people place as a greater priority than God and God’s house in this world? I believe we all know the answer is a resounding “yes”. The most popular sport in America is football and the National Football League has almost all their games on what

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day? Sunday, the Lord's day. Every week there are probably 14 NFL games on Sunday and with each of those stadiums holding at least 50,000 (with many holding much more); that is at least 700,000 people that spend their entire Lord's day valuing grown men carry and throw a football as of "greater worth" than ascribing worth to God in worship on Sunday. NASCAR has all their top-tier races on Sunday, PGA golf tournaments end on Sunday, many NBA basketball games are on Sunday as well, and many other examples could be given. Not only do well over 1 million people attend these various sporting events on any given Sunday, but they plan their whole schedules around these events. Those devoted fans (literally "fanatics") wake up early to prepare food for a tailgate, get to the stadium early to see the warmups, are willing to stay late if the game goes into overtime, and then can't wait to rehash everything that happened with their friends all throughout the next week. All the meanwhile, many of those same people who might attend church, are unwilling to wake up early to prepare food for church, sleep late and either don't go to church or get their horribly late, complain if the sermon goes to 12:01, and don't discuss the service with anyone else after walking out the church doors. While our churches are almost empty, stadiums are full and have a waiting list for tickets (people who want to be there at a ball game but haven't had a chance to buy tickets); our churches have people come in late, leave early, and sleep through service, which those same ones when they attend a sporting event wake up early, stay late, and have an excitement about the proceedings that causes them to shout with joy during the game. We should have that same excitement about the service of God and our Lord's day worship should be the highlight of our week to where it occupies our conversation our entire week.

Now on to the merchandise. Each of these sports teams, sells merchandise and clothes with their team's logo and even sell jerseys for their most popular players. The same people who are unwilling to give graciously to care for the needs of the church are willing to pay \$100 each for the jerseys of their favorite players and their entire wardrobe has some logo of their favorite team. We put posters of our favorite players on our walls (does that seem like a graven image to you yet?).

It's evident that these stadiums are our modern-day temples of Diana where false gods are worshipped by millions of people every Lord's day. However, those stadiums are not just used for sporting events they are used for music concerts and many other idolatrous activities in our culture. In music, we spend money to have the latest greatest songs for our favorite artists, and know all the words to those songs and are willing to belt out those secular songs any time.

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However, in our song service in church, we don't sing at all or yawn through it or sing in a lackluster way to the Lord. People go to a concert and get there early and stay late to be able to just see their favorite singer in person or get a picture with them but that excitement wears off in regards to meeting the Lord every Sunday in worship. Then we also put posters of our favorite singers on our walls. Do you realize when we put a poster on our wall of one of these people, that is a lifeless representation or image of real person that we are ascribing worth to? Instead of the image of our false gods being graven into a metal (graven images), now they are just printed in color on paper and hung on our walls.

Have you ever heard someone say that a sports or music or movie person that I have as a poster on my wall, that they are my "idol" – that I look up to his person and I aspire to be like that person one day? Do you realize that this "hidden idolatry" has gotten so ingrained in our culture that we are not only following all the attributes of idol worship in our actions, putting up posters on our walls of others who we "idolize" but it's so commonplace and we are totally comfortable even calling a famous person our "idol" and that we "idolize" them? Then we cement our idolatry by spending our money to go see them in person, to buy all their gear (as graven images).

The most popular music competition in our country for almost two decades is even called "American Idol". Even good sincere Christians watch American Idol every week and don't even consider that we are literally watching a show claiming to be crowning a singing and music idol and that is totally normal to us. The idolatry of the music industry is just so ingrained in our culture that we don't even bat an eye anymore. The same could be said of not just sports and music, but movies and many other areas in our American culture.

Now, let me insert this disclaimer. I'm not trying to say that all sports, music, movies, and entertainment are evil. They are fine and lawful in moderation and when put in their proper place. However, I hope you can clearly see that many of us have not handled these areas of our

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life in moderation. The issue where something rises to being an idol is if we ascribe it more worth than God – then it has clearly become a false god and idol. If we read every new book by our favorite author but never open the word of God to read scripture, what does that say about our priorities? If we plan all our weekend around a sporting event, but neglect public worship at the Lord's house, that reflects a problem in our priorities. I would implore you to just measure how we engage in these things of the world based on the lens of God's word and take the Lord's admonition to "Consider your ways". Then I believe you will have appropriate clarity for how we can still engage in some of these things in a lawful way, but not violate our first priority to Christ that causes these things to be a sin.

Now, I'm not presenting all of this idolatry in the American culture to just be a curmudgeon. First, I want us to consider the pervasive scope of the idolatry that's all around us even if we could not see it before. Mainly, with this in mind I want us to consider what the equivalent of radical repentance that we see in Ephesus in Acts 19 would possibly look like in America so we can understand the magnitude of what this radical repentance looks like in our lives. Based on the powerful moving and conviction of the Holy Spirit, in all of Ephesus and almost all of Asia so many people were being converted to the truth and joining the church that the places of the idolatrous worship becoming totally vacant and the niche industry for false grave images in those cities were going bankrupt. Could you imagine a radical repentance and revival from our idol worship in America that our massive stadiums on each Lord's day were vacant and people were instead worshipping the Lord? The football teams would also soon be on the verge of bankruptcy because not only were they losing tickets sales but they would also lose merchandise and apparel sales. The business that made all their money selling logoed sports goods or your favorite musician would be going bankrupt. I doubt musicians would have many nationwide tours if people quit attending those concerts due to a desire to invest themselves in the kingdom of God.

Musicians who only engage in vulgar sinful lyrics and themes would be eliminated because their albums would not sell at all. Movies that portrayed sinful themes would be a bust at the box office and soon if no one bought those movies, these wicked movies would quit being produced. The bright lights of Las Vegas, literally known as Sin City, would go out because no one would travel there to partake in the filth that city offers to the flesh. Pornographic websites would be taken down and Playboy magazine would go out of business, and so many other examples could be given.

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Could you imagine the economic impact and shift that sincere radical repentance and forsaking these idols in our lives would have on our American economy? No revival or repentance is complete until it affects your pocket book, until it changes how you spend your money. Entire economies can be impacted when God's people consider their ways and repent, just like we see in Ephesus. If God's people really took the first commandment seriously and make a commitment to have no other gods before the Lord, that would drastically shift how business is done in this country and I dare say our modern-day temples of Diana and graven images craftsmen would both go out of business.

In Haggai 1, the prophet calls upon Judah to "Consider your ways" and repent (Hag. 1:5&7). These were Jews (God's people) that were not openly worshipping false idols of Molech and Baal like their forefathers. No, these were the good Jews who left the false gods of Babylon to come back to Jerusalem to rebuild God's house. They were devoted to Jehovah God, not false gods. But unfortunately, the work of rebuilding God's house was met with opposition and God's house lay dormant for over 15 years. However, God cuts to the heart of the problem with this generation of God's people – your priorities have become misaligned. In other words, just because you are not worshipping some graven image false god does not mean that you are not engaging in idolatry. What was the idol these people were "ascribing the most worth to" instead of Jehovah God? Their own houses and lives. *"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"* (Hag. 1:4)

What had become more important than God's house for these Jews? Their own houses and the things of their own life. They were more than happy to add on additional rooms to their own houses, improve their own roofs, renovate their own kitchens and bathrooms, but all the time the house of God laid in waste and ruin.

These people of God had gotten their priorities so misaligned they legitimately thought it was fine to place their own houses and their own lives as of greater importance than the house of God. The application today is quite fitting for our American culture. Our churches are generally

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in ruin and disrepair. Just like this generation of Jews, we *“sow much and bring in little”*; we *“eat but don't have enough”*

; we “

*drink but are not filled”*

; we

*“are clothed, but there is none warm”*

(Hag. 1:6). We have an abundance of all these things but are still not satisfied with our abundance. When they sowed much and looked for much, God

*“did blow upon it”*

and they came home with very little. That's sounds kind of mean of the Lord. Why did he blow upon all their hard work?

*“Because of mine house that is waste (in ruin), and ye run every man unto his own house.”*

(Hag. 1:9)

In a spiritual application in the church, I believe we could say that our churches have suffered from a lack of increase, a lack of revival, a spiritual drought. I believe the same root cause could be identified in our culture today as well – we've placed a greater priority on our own houses and our own lives than on God's house and the church. And thus, just like these Jews: *“Therefore, the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon the ground which brings forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labor of the hands.”*

(Hag. 1:10-11) What a sobering passage. Because of their prioritization of themselves over God, the Lord called for a drought upon the land. Notice everything that was affected by this drought: the land, the mountains, the corn, the new wine, the oil, the ground, the cattle, and especially notice “upon men” and “upon all the labor of the hands”. This was not just a drought of rain; this was a drought that was placed “upon men” and upon all the labor of the hands of these men who were not willing to obey the first commandment of total devotion to God. Speaking candidly, I believe the church has seen a severe drought upon our land in the church; upon our corn, wine and oil in the church; a drought upon our men; and a drought upon all the labor of our hands. We see it with a general apathy for spiritual things, for complacency and apathy in church attendance, which leads to the ultimate effects of a drought, which is death as our churches close their doors.

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Simply put, placing God on the backburner in our lives is unacceptable in God's eyes. God requires total devotion to him. He will not be content to ride in the passenger seat as you drive the course of your life. He will not be the underwriter to the building of your own house when we neglect the building of God's house. Furthermore, we see the effects in our lives when we do not place the house of God as the priority in our lives: drought, decline, and death.

What is the remedy for this severe drought of spiritual revival from God? *"Thus saith the Lord of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain and bring wood and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord."*

(Hag. 1:7-8) Get your priorities straight. There's nothing wrong with having a nice house, but not if it causes your priorities to be shifted to where the house of God lies in waste. God simply requires our service to God, his house, and his kingdom to take priority, to be number one in our lives:

*"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all things shall be added unto you."*

(Matt. 6:33)

This message to consider their ways resonated with its hearers and they repented and got back to the priority work they should have been doing all along: *"Then Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him, and the people did fear the Lord... And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the Lord of hosts."*

(Hag. 1:12-14) God "stirred up the spirit" of the leaders and of all the people to begin again the work they had neglected. All revival and repentance will come from God-anointed preaching in power and demonstration of the Spirit; a call in that preaching to repent and consider our ways; the Lord stirring up the spirit of the people, revealing and convicting them of their sins; and then the people actually repenting and changing their actions in obedience to God's word.

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What's really neat about this occasion is that Zerubbabel and the people had been under a government cease and desist order to not build the temple for many years. They had allowed that order to detract them from the work at hand. They disobeyed the current ruling of the Persian king and began the work back anyway. Then the local governor petitioned the king of Persia again to stop their work, but after further review of their governmental records, he found the original decree of Cyrus that not only authorized the work but gave governmental funds to support the work (See Ezra 4-6). So Zerubbabel and the people were convicted and stirred up to begin the work back, even though the government was in opposition of the work. But God honored that obedience, and not only was the king's heart turned to them and they were allowed to begin back building, but he decreed for the government to pay for all the construction costs, to pay for all the animals for sacrifices and to return all the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had removed from the temple. Wow! God not only blessed their work, but he used the Persian government to fund the construction costs and sacrifices for the work. They experienced a revival in the work of building up God's house that was in disrepair and God clearly blessed that work with revival. Certainly, we need that type of God sent and God blessed revival in the house of the Lord, in the church here today.

I believe we think we want revival in America. We definitely want the effects of revival – new converts, baptisms, larger crowds, new churches planted, and deeper devotion and spirituality. But the real question is are we willing to allow the life rearranging and priority shifting work of radical repentance that is the cause of revival? God has called upon his people to repent all throughout time. God is never the problem in revival. God's people are always the problem in the equation. Historically, God's people have not wanted to submit totally and fully to the authority of God, to allow him to dictate and arrange our lives totally in accordance with his word, to repent and follow Christ. Instead, we want to do our own thing, coddle our own private idols, run to our own house, and complain that God does not send revival. No, revival occurs when radical repentance invades and renovates our lives. That radical repentance begins with our sincere evaluation of our lives and shortcomings compared to the standard of God's word. God still calls to his people today who pray for revival: "Consider your ways and repent."