

REVIVAL OR REFORMATION?

by Chip Brogden | Blog, Ekklesia, Fellowship & Church

[Note: This will definitely overturn some tables... Thanks David Emechete for digging this up. It's a goldmine.]

There have always been some who not only recognize the glaring deficiencies of what the church is, but are grieved and troubled by what they see, to the point that they cannot remain content to let things continue on, but are compelled to do something about it.

Of these blessed few who choose to stand up and speak out against the religious system, the response seems to fall along one of three approaches. As we will see, only one approach is harmonious with the prophetic example set forth in the history of the people of God, and it is the one approach that seems to be the last resort instead of the first recourse. But let us consider them in the proper order.

First, there are those who call for what amounts to Reformation. These are the Martin Luthers who stand up to the religious leadership and rightly confront their unscriptural practices. The well-meaning intention is to fix what is wrong with the church by identifying all of its problems and coming up with Scriptural solutions. But this represents a zealous naivety on the part of all would-be reformers. First, it assumes that once the leaders recognize their unscriptural practices, they will repent and change their ways. History has proven that this never happens. Second, it assumes that the church system is something God wants to reform, when the truth is that the church system was made by man and was never authorized by God in the first place. Reforming it has the same effect as patching an old garment with new cloth, or pouring new wine into old wineskins, which results in ruining both the old and the new.

These attempts at reformation, if they are not quashed altogether, typically result in the establishment of something very similar to compete with what was already there. When the Catholic church rejected Luther, he founded another religious system based upon his understanding of Scriptural truth. To be sure it was an improvement over the Catholic system; but it was still a religious system nevertheless. From the Protestant Reformation many thousands of denominations have sprung, each more or less based upon their own interpretation of Scripture and upon the founding principles of the Roman Catholic church

embedded in their history. The end result is that we are even further away from the simplicity of Christ with each attempt to repair what God never called us to build in the first place.

Second, there are those who espouse Revival as the cure to everything that ails Churchianity. The church is sleeping, and needs to be roused from sleep (so the thinking goes). The revivals of generations past, and the preachers who seemed to be instrumental in stirring up these revivals, are idealized and venerated as great heroes of the faith; the kind of people we need to be (or find) in order to experience the same kind of revival and awakening that they experienced. The Revivalist is similar to the Reformer in that both types of people hope to repair what is wrong with the church, hoping to spark a movement or a move of God that will shake the church out of complacency and restore something of the power that the early Christians had. But the Revivalist lays emphasis more on the spiritual experience than Scriptural integrity. This naturally creates a certain hankering after signs, wonders, miracles, and visible manifestations of the "power" of God as evidences and proofs that God is moving or doing something to revive and restore to what used to be.

Again, the clear witness of Scripture and the prophetic record of God's dealings with His people rises up to contradict the Revivalist in his enthusiastic naivety. Yes, it is true that revivals and spiritual awakenings have occurred and will continue to occur. One of the greatest revivals of the 20th Century was the charismatic movement, which formed the background of my own spiritual awakening. Even so, however much individual people may have benefited from these revivals and spiritual movements, none of these things have resulted in any fundamental change to Churchianity itself. The religious system continues on, and the deception and abuse it dispenses in the name of God gets worse with every generation.

God will not continue to pour out His Spirit or send any kind of revival to people who still remain in a religious system that God has judged and called us to come out of. Any real pouring out of God's Spirit must result in a people being called out; God is not the author of something that requires people to go back to Babylon in order to benefit from it themselves, or to bring Life to it. On the contrary, the very idea of "revival" is frequently used by Churchianity in a desperate attempt to breathe new life into something that is clearly dead. It is dead because it is under the judgment of God. He has not called us to bring it back to life again; on the contrary, His judgment says, "Follow Me,

and let the dead bury their dead” (Mt.8:22).

While God has certainly been patient with His people and has even blessed efforts to reform or revive, it has always been with an understanding that He was calling those who had been reformed and revived to come out and be obedient to Him. The prophetic declaration is to “come out of [Babylon], My people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues” (Rev. 18:4).

God’s ultimate intention is neither Reformation nor Revival, but Repudiation! Repudiation is a strong word. It means, “to reject the authority or validity of; to disown or cast off.” But this is precisely what followers of Jesus have had to do from the very beginning. To the elders and high priests of Judaism, the apostles stated simply, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Later, when the Christian Church took on the same religious spirit as the Jewish Sanhedrin, other men and women followed in the same tradition of the apostles and repudiated the authority of the religious establishment in order to maintain the Testimony of Jesus. They were neither Reformers nor Revivalists; they simply repudiated the religious system altogether.

There is a wonderful reformation happening right now - not within the religious system, but within the hearts and minds of people who are repudiating that system. There is a tremendous revival taking place right now, and it is a revival along spiritual lines, among those who have heeded the call to “come out of Babylon” and have been raised to new Life. God is revealing Christ to people, and people are learning how to enter into Him and how to live in Him, and how to walk in Him. They are leaving the complexities of Religion for the simplicity of Relationship. This is a quiet reformation, a quiet revival, a grass-roots movement that is governed by the Holy Spirit.