

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, No.35, August 27, 2013 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **The Grow in Grace Newsletter**— a weekly Bible Study, plus news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church... sent forth to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide who receive the Newsletter), in the experience of 2 Peter 3:18. ***"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."***

JUST WHAT SHOULD BE OUR REVIVAL HEART CRY?

Generally, when Christians in America start speaking about ‘revival’ and/or the need for ‘revival’— a significant part of their desire is that our nation be returned to previous times when it is believed that America was much more Christian or at least ‘Christian friendly!’ Of course, it would be a good thing to long for a righteous and just society where God’s laws are respected and where people all do the right thing. But the question is how do we get the world [or our nation] from its current state to [move toward] a much more ideal state? There are many Christians who feel that this needs to be done **by bringing into power, a government that will enact laws that will help change society** into a more righteous society. THUS, it is critically important for Christians to be very involved in politics. But is that correct? Has this been tried before? Does the Bible [especially the New Testament] give us any guidance on this matter?

I. THE WORLD AND THE CHURCH

First we need to understand that the Bible makes a clear distinction between “the world” and “the church”, or what 1 Corinthians 5:12-13 calls “those who are inside” and “those who are outside”. Jesus said [of His disciples] *“They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world”* (John 17:16). **The world and the church cannot be the same thing.** That sounds pretty obvious, but what does that mean? It means you cannot have a “Christian world”. The two things are mutually exclusive. Christians cannot be the world and the world cannot be Christian (although both keep trying to be)... **But here’s the problem. If you cannot have a Christian world, then you cannot have a Christian nation!** Nations are, by definition, part of the world and its system and the two can never be the same.

[REALITY: Confusion on this point shows up when American Christians are quick to rally and get excited about a SAVE OUR NATION campaign; but do NOT unite and get

exercised about the SAVING OF THE LOST in America or the lost in the nations of the world. Moreover, we are too quick to want the destruction of 'ENEMY NATIONS' and **forget that the chief mandate of the New Testament is the saving of the LOST in those nations and that we have brothers and sisters in Christ in such nations!]**

By this, (You cannot have a Christian nation), I do not deny that there are, or have been, nations who [had or] have a predominantly "Christian" ethic, morality or value system. **HOWEVER, for a nation to be Christian in the true sense of the word,** that nation, including its government and all its people (1) would need to be born-again Christians (at least the vast majority), (2) its laws would need to reflect the whole of the Bible (not just the Ten Commandments) and (3) its government and the leadership of the church would need to be one-and-the-same. [Church and state would be one.]

[Possibly] The closest to this ideal was in the nation of Israel when God Himself established a theocracy - a nation under God's rule. In Israel there was no difference between church and state. The civil government and the spiritual leadership was the same and there was only one law - God's law. The problem was that this did not work. Not because God failed or because His plan was flawed, but because the people of Israel were sinful, and in constant rebellion to God and His laws.

And here is the rub. As long as people's hearts are unregenerate they will never (indeed cannot) keep God's law. (Romans 8:7) This, again, is not a reflection on the Law, but on the inherent wickedness of man's heart. **Therefore to attempt to create a Christian society through legislation becomes an exercise in futility because the laws do not change the wickedness of man's heart!**

The Pharisees in Jesus' time tried to do the same thing. They added law upon law. They taught the laws, shamed and punished those who disobeyed them and did everything in their power to create a society which would conform to their idea of a biblical one. **But in the end they produced a society which was so morally corrupt that they crucified the King of Glory! Trying to legislate an unrighteous community into becoming righteous produces the same thing in the world as it does in the church— hypocrisy.** You simply force people to appear to do the right thing on the outside while the evil just goes underground where it flourishes even more under the cover of darkness. Hypocrisy is about two standards, one for what can be seen and one for that which cannot be seen. **I am not propagating lawlessness and antinomianism in the church or in the world. [Added note: It's just the New Testament reality that neither Jesus nor His Apostles sought to gain political power and use such to bring in a 'Christian' nation or world.** Moreover, there is the historical reality that the times in church history when the church has truly influenced society— such was the result of true conversions and a revival of holiness in the church.]

The Holy Spirit through Paul is specific: Civil government is placed there by God and its purpose is to maintain order and peace and if we disobey the government, we will not only be punished by the judicial system, but also by God. (Romans 13:1-7).

[**Added note**] MOREOVER, there are Biblical guidelines for ‘discipline’ in the church! YES, in a fallen world, many laws are in place in society and in various organizations—not in an attempt to ‘produce’ righteousness— but in an attempt to have ‘law and order’ and/or to place a fence against anarchy. **Such laws** reveal the wickedness of our rebellious hearts as well as providing punishment for crime. Also... in such an environment, we witness the need for the Gospel of God’s amazing grace.] **REALITY: [The] only way to get people to avoid the wrong and to also do the right, (and to do so irrespective of whether they are policed or not), is if their hearts are changed.** And human hearts can only be changed when they are born-again. It is then that God writes his laws on our hearts and minds. **For the unregenerate** the law is an external thing which is written on stone or paper and which requires enforcing by external “police”. **To the saved** the law is written on their desires, will and intellect and it does not require external policing but it is obeyed willingly (Hebrews 8). **“...not with eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart”** (Ephesians 6:6)

II. WHICH KINGDOM IS TO BE OUR FOCUS?

JESUS SAYS, **"My kingdom is not of this world.** If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" John 18:36. [**Added note**]

1. Thus, the New Testament Church does not focus on the issues of earthly citizenship. She does not (in the name of Christ) rally national patriotism; rather, she is focused on the ONE HOLY NATION that spans the globe which has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ: **1 Peter 2:9-10!**

2. The New Testament Church is called to be a good citizen (Romans 13; 1 Timothy 2:1-4; Titus 3:1-7) but she lives in the reality of

(1) THE COMING JUDGMENT;

(2) The burning up of this present world by fire; and the

(3) Glorious hope of NEW HEAVENS and a NEW EARTH! (2 Peter 3:7-14); THEREFORE,

(4) The Great Commission is her master passion (Matthew 24: 1-14; 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8) and she is looking for a city whose builder and maker is God, (Heb. 11:13-16, 36-40; 1 John 3:1-3.)

III. Change! — But What Kind?

Everybody wants change. People want the way the city and the country is governed to change and people want changes in their churches. President Obama won the presidency on the slogan **“change you can believe in”** and currently every political candidate of every party in America is promising change. **Many Christians and churches are actively campaigning for change in the country. They are QUICK to rally around REVIVAL for our nation!** There is no question that things need to change, but the question is how is that change going to be achieved and by

whom? [Added note: LET'S GET REAL: Can worldly, sin filled, strife filled Christian homes and churches be effective for REVIVAL in the land?]

****CHANGE— from the TOP down or from the BOTTOM Up?**

MOST everybody expects change to come from the top. The President and the Pastor must change the country and the church. And if they can't do it, then we need to get the right man in the job who will make the changes we need. **But the truth is that leaders cannot bring about change when the people refuse to change.**

[**Added comment:** It is true that ungodly leaders have ungodly influence and godly leaders have godly influence. Ungodly leaders will have an ungodly agenda. However, we seem to forget that WE PLACED the leaders in office; and so often they are but a reflection of us! Nevertheless, God is still on the Throne of the universe and He rules in the affairs of men! As to the 'right' leader, consider the following...]

Moses was [one of] the greatest spiritual and political leaders of all time but in spite of all his gifts, skills and anointing— he could not get the people to change from a nation of fearful slaves to a victorious people of God. This left God with only one option and that was to destroy that whole generation. It is no different today. Even if Moses came back as the leader of this nation or of your church, he would not be able to make the people change if they themselves did not change! The leader is not the people. The Pastor is not the church and the President is not the nation. The ability and desire to change lies with each individual and change in the church and the country will not come until we, the people, begin to change. [**Personal encounters with God are required!**]

The first five chapters of Isaiah reflect the political situation in many countries and the spiritual situation in many churches today. Judah was filled with corruption, sin, materialism, immorality, addictions, arrogance, hedonism and a perversion of justice. Isaiah saw that and had as much to say about it as we have to say about our society. Six times Isaiah pronounces woe on the sin and the sinners but in chapter six something dramatic happens.

Isaiah saw the Lord and he saw himself in comparison to God. This time his response is **“Woe is me, for I am undone!”** (Isaiah 6:5). **Isaiah finally understood that it was about his own imperfections and problems first, and that change for the nation had to start within his own heart and life. That's the problem.** It is so easy [for us] to blame everyone else and to enumerate the nation and the church's problems, but we often fail to recognize our personal problems and that change has to begin with each one of us.

1. We want the Ten Commandments written in stone in the court house, but it is not written in our hearts. In fact, we can't even recite them!

2. We lash out about the impact that **Islam** is having on our society but we have done [little or] nothing to impact our community with true Christianity.

3. We will picket against abortion clinics but will use the same clinics when our licentiousness bears fruit.

4. We are angry about the **4,000 babies that are aborted every day** in America (and we should be). But no one cares about the millions of spiritual babes that never come to be born again and are aborted because of the stumbling blocks and hostile environment they find amongst Christians and in churches.

5. We protest against same-sex “marriage”, yet our own marriages are a mess. [Added note: **MORE AND MORE PASTORS are leading the way** as utter love failures, divorcing their wives and/or having no humility of heart to own personal failure and not seriously seeking to save troubled marriages or to restore a fallen wife.]

6. We complain about **homosexuals** and their rising visibility and influence. But we are not an example to our children of what a godly man and woman looks like.

7. We emasculate [weaken] men and smile when boys are effeminate and fathers are either brutes or wimps and we wonder why boys become homosexual. **Men do not know the meaning of true love** and they do not take responsibility to be leaders in their homes and yet wonder why girls grow up to hate men and love women.

8. Everyone is frustrated about corruption, pork barrels and special deals in government **yet we bribe our children and spouses** when we have not done the right thing or we bribe them to get them to do the right thing.

9. We show favoritism to children, church members and others and at the same time we blame the government for favoring special interest groups and for nepotism.

10. We complain about the government bailing out big business when big business deserved to crash. At the same time we bail our children out every time they paint themselves into a financial [or moral] corner.

11. Very few Christians read the Bible and pray regularly and even fewer read the Bible and pray with their children. Yet those same people are angry about the removal of prayer and the Bible from schools.

12. Everyone is perturbed by the **rising national debt** and the inability of the government to curb expenditure when their personal credit is maxed out and their own greed drives them to spend more than they earn.

13. Many complain about the **removal of the cross** from public places but very, very few live a crucified life. **This is the problem.** *It is much easier to lobby, picket, protest and blame others for the very problems we are not willing to fix in our own lives.*

14. We can have a cross on every street corner, but until Christians, individually, learn what it means to take up their cross daily, nothing will change. Like the fornicating, drunken celebrity who wears a cross around their neck, so Christians think that architectural crosses **will cover** the nation and church's backsliding and sin. But it does not.

15. Many Christians want revival in their church and complain about the state of the church, but they themselves are cold and far from God. **The same people** who complain that the church does not grow, never bring an unbeliever to hear the Gospel, let alone witness to anyone.

16. Some Christians wonder why the meetings are not full, but they themselves miss meetings for any excuse.

17. People complain that the worship is dead but they themselves do not sing with all their heart and never open their mouth to say a few words to praise the Lord.

18. Christians complain about the lack of love in the church, but they themselves will not go out of their way to show love to others.

19. Every church has a group of people who wish they could have a better pastor, but they never pray for God to anoint him and make him better.

You see we all think that if we can get different leaders in the church and in the nation that things will change. They will not. *Change begins with you and me.*

If every Christian in your church suddenly began to serve the Lord the way He should be served, revival will break out in your church, in spite of the pastor.

When Christians in this nation begin to be true, real Bible Christians instead of the fakes most are, the nation will change, no matter who is in power. [Added note] **There is a huge difference between an Evangelical, Fundamentalist Revival of religion and a genuine life transforming God-sent Revival!**

1. To have a Revival of Religion all one needs to accomplish is to raise the attendance, get a lot of 'decisions for Christ', bring about a number of baptisms, have good offerings, entertaining music and a fiery evangelist with a good splattering of humor who will blast culture's sins but not the sins of the seated congregation; and after a few weeks... all is back to sin filled normal.

2. In contrast, God-sent Revival is very disturbing to those in the local pulpit and pew!

Change begins with you and me, personally.

That is the only area you and I have jurisdiction and control over. **Jesus said we should begin in Jerusalem**, then Judea and then Samaria and then the rest of the world (Acts 1:8), but we want to begin in Washington, London or 'whereever' and then work back. It does not work that way. **Change begins with me and you!**

Every nation in the world desperately needs change and so do most churches. But the change will never come from the top down.

[Added note] In the last book of the Bible, The Unveiling of JESUS CHRIST... Jesus has 7 specific letters to His church.

1. Those letters do not lament the darkness of the world.
2. They do not give a strategy for calling nations in which Christians live to righteousness.
3. These letters call local congregations to revival!

The same is true in the other New Testament letters to churches.

GOD IS CALLING ME, GOD US CALLING US to revival! (This article is by Pastor Anton Bosch, portions edited out due to space restraints; and 'added notes', added.)

Grace to one and all! / James Bell / www.southsidegallatin.org