

REFORMATION or REVIVAL

Which Does the Church Need?

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Because the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church has spoken against the current emphasis on revival, there are those who believe that we have "denied our revival heritage." We wish to set the record straight.

We would agree with many that the visible church today is in sad condition, torn apart, weak and compromising. But we do not believe that revival, as it is commonly understood, is the answer.

We have no objection to word "revival," since it is used in Scripture. We believe, however, that the kind of revival most people want and pray for is not the kind of revival that Scripture talks about. Nor do we believe that the popular idea of revival is the kind of thing the church needs today.

We believe this because the one word that comes through in all the talk about revival is the word "*extraordinary*." Revival itself, according to all who speak of it, is something extraordinary and involves extraordinary numbers of conversions, extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit, etc.

What the church needs is not something extraordinary, but some very ordinary things (ordinary, at least as far as the Word of God is concerned). Before the church prays for extraordinary numbers of conversions, she needs to do the ordinary work of caring for and teaching the members she already has. This is seldom done.

Before we think about extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, we need to have the ordinary gifts of the Spirit, godly Christian living (Gal. 5:22-26), teaching and preaching the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), Biblical church government (not by one man, but by elders), and Biblical worship (Jn. 4:24). These are sadly lacking in the church.

Such a return to the ordinary things of Scripture (really not so ordinary), we prefer to call "reformation," not "revival," though we would not quibble about words.

The great Protestant Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was a true reformation in that sense. It was a return to the Scriptures, to the doctrines of Scripture, to preaching and teaching *all* the truths of Scripture, to Biblical church government, discipline, and worship.

These things and many other "ordinary" things, desperately needed in the church, are missing. The children of the church are not instructed, family worship is a forgotten thing. Observance of the Lord's Day has all but disappeared. Where the church does have elders, they are often ignorant of their calling and the election of elders is little more in many cases than a popularity contest, or a matter of politics. Worship is largely a matter of formalism. Church discipline is completely lacking. Preaching degenerates into political commentary or a call for social action. Many doctrines of Scripture are almost entirely forgotten.

To give just one doctrinal example of what we mean: among many other things the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century was a return to the great Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone without works. Not only is this doctrine rarely preached today, but there is hardly one Christian in ten who can even explain what it means. Yet it is an understanding of this truth that leads to peace with God through Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1). So with many other doctrines.

We believe that the current interest in revival is just a desire for a "quick fix" of the problems of the church, when the thing that is really needed is the hard work of doing the ordinary things to which God's Word calls the church. That work belongs both to the officers and to the members of the church. By such work the church will be reformed and renewed as it was nearly 500 years ago. Without it there is no hope for the church. May God in His mercy grant it.