

Revival Study Part 3

Puritan Revival

Handout from the class taught by Pastor Doug Livingston, September 26, 2012

1377 – John Wycliffe led the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation against the Roman Catholic Church & the Pope.

1534 – The Catholic Church in England split from Catholicism & became the Church of England (Anglican or Episcopal Church) with the King/Queen as the head of the Church.

1564 – A group of “Puritans” tried to purify the Church of England from within to bring her back to the Bible.

1586 – A group of “Separatists” or “Pilgrims” fled England to Holland & then to America in 1620 seeking religious freedom from the King/Queen.

The Puritans & Pilgrims are our Congregational ancestors. They had much to say about revival as I am learning from J. I Packer’s book, “A Quest for Godliness – The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life.” Here is some of what the Puritans valued:

They were devoted to the Word of God & put a high value on spiritual maturity which they believed was seasoned by hardship & struggle.

They were ever aware of the spiritual battle they were in. Packer writes: “They accepted conflict as their calling, seeing themselves as the Lord’s soldier-pilgrims, just as in John Bunyan’s allegory (Pilgrim’s Progress), & not expecting to be able to advance a single step without opposition of one sort or another.”

They made no distinction between secular & sacred & viewed all of creation as sacred &, as a result, all activities must be sanctified to the glory of God.

They lived ordered lives. They planned & proportioned their time with care making sure their day was filled with activities which were honoring & glorifying to God.

They valued the Sunday morning sermon. Packer writes, “Puritan meditation on Scripture was modeled on the Puritan sermon; in meditation the Puritan would seek to search & challenge his heart, stir his affections to hate sin & love righteousness, & encourage himself with God’s promises, just as Puritan preachers would do from the pulpit.”

When the Puritan churches began to drift away from these values, their pastors would begin to preach on “revival” or “reform” as Richard Baxter called it. Packer comments, “When, for instance, in 1656, Baxter published his classic on the ministry, ‘The Reformed Pastor,’ what he meant by ‘reformed’ was not Calvinistic in doctrine; what he meant was renewed in vigor, zeal & purpose.” Note: Sometimes, the pastor needs to be revived before he senses the need in his church for revival.

Jonathan Edwards wrote much about revival & witnessed 2 of them (1734-35; 1740-42): one in his church (First Congregational, Northampton, MA); the other in New England.

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Packer summarizes Edwards' thoughts on revival under three main categories:

1. Revival is an extraordinary work of God the Holy Spirit reinvigorating & propagating Christian piety in a community. Edwards shared this experience as an example:

The strength of the body was very often taken away with a deep mourning for sin, as committed against so holy & good a God ... There has been a very great sense of the certain truth of the great things revealed in the gospel; an overwhelming sense of the glory of the work of redemption, & the way of salvation by Jesus Christ ... The person felt a great delight in singing praises to God & Jesus Christ, & longing that this present life may be, as it were, one continued song of praise to God. There was a longing, as the person expressed it, to sit & sing this life away; & an overcoming pleasure in the thoughts of spending an eternity in that exercise.

2. Revivals have a central place in the revealed purposes of God. Edwards:

When God manifests Himself with such glorious power, in a work of this nature (such as the New England revival), he appears especially determined to put honor upon His Son, & to fulfill His oath that He has sworn to Him, that He would make every knee to bow ... to Him. God hath had it much on His heart, from all eternity, to glorify His dear & only-begotten Son; & there are some special seasons that He appoints to that end, wherein He comes forth with omnipotent power to fulfill His promise ... to Him. Now these are times of remarkable pouring out of His Spirit, to advance His kingdom; such is the day of His power.

3. Revivals are the most glorious of all God's work in the world. Edwards:

Such a work is, in its nature & kind, the most glorious of any work of God whatsoever. It is the work of redemption (the great end of all the other works of God, & of which the work of creation was but a shadow) ... it is the work of new creation, which is infinitely more glorious than the old. I am bold to say, that the work of God in the conversion of one soul is a more glorious work of God than the creation of the whole material universe.

Edwards also warns about false revivals. He notes: "Satan was trained in the best divinity school in the universe." As a result, Packer writes, "He (Satan) keeps in step with God, actively perverting & caricaturing all that the Creator is doing. It is for this reason, Edwards insists, that it is so vitally important to judge spiritual movements, not by their immediate phenomena or by-products, but by their ultimate effects in the lives of those involved in them."

In conclusion, let me quote Edwards on the importance of prayer for revival:

It is God's will, through His wonderful grace, that the prayers of His saints should be one great & principal means of carrying on the designs of Christ's kingdom in the world. When God has something very great to accomplish for His church, it is His will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of His people.