

God's Conditions For Revival

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In Appreciation

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my home church, the Southport Wesleyan Methodist Church, for their prayers, support and encouragement during the time this booklet was being prepared. They - were mindful that the message contained in these pages is needed by all churches, not just their own.

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PREFACE

"The Church is in an incredible dilemma." That was the comment of a young sales executive being interviewed recently on a TV programme. In her eyes, the church was irrelevant and lacked any real influence in our society. One prominent minister went so far as to say that the church as an institution was dead.

For those of us who regard ourselves as part of the church, such statements should stand as an open rebuke. Why has the church lost its influence? Where is that dynamic power that once characterised the people of God?

It is no good pretending that the state of the church is in a healthy condition. Some churches are growing, for which we praise God, but the overall picture is one of decline and fragmentation. Such a situation calls for drastic action.

Throughout history, there have been other times when the Church has declined. Sensing the seriousness of the situation, God's people have earnestly sought the Lord for a special working of the Holy Spirit amongst them. Such movements of God have been called 'revival'.

Despite the many evangelistic crusades, camps and beach missions that are held, a deep moving of God's Spirit in the church has failed to take place. The desperate need in Australia at this point in time is for a deep convicting work of the Holy Spirit among the people of God. Before the church can effectively reach the unsaved community, we need to get our own house in order.

Recently I was challenged by reading a statement made by Evan Roberts, the man so greatly used of God in the Welsh Revival of 1904, where he said "Revival alone can be given by the Holy Spirit of God when the conditions are fulfilled." If that is true, then it follows that we in Australia have failed to meet the conditions laid down by God.

This led me to look closely at the conditions God has set for a spiritual awakening. In 2 Chronicles 7.14 there are four:

*"If my people who are called by my name, will **humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways**, then I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

I asked the Lord for understanding as to the true meaning of each of these four conditions. Many questions started to arise. I began to wonder if we really understand what these conditions are. What does it mean for instance 'to humble ourselves'? And what is the difference between 'praying' and 'seeking God's face'? Why are they listed separately? What are the 'wicked ways' referred to?

My search led me to examine closely many passages of scripture. Slowly, the true meaning began to emerge. I came to see that the basic reasons why we haven't seen a genuine revival in our country are (i) we do not really understand what the conditions are and (ii) we are not willing to pay the price required for revival.

These brief studies are in part the result of my search. Primarily, they are an attempt to understand the conditions God has set for revival. They are intended for those who have a deep hunger in their heart for God to revive his church. They are for those who are willing to meet the conditions, no matter what the cost. There must be a dissatisfaction with the state of the church in general and in their own lives in particular. In addition, they must be prepared to have their whole lifestyle re-examined and if need be, changed. But above all, they must be willing for God to begin his work in their own life first, before they start looking at others.

My prayer is that God may enlighten our minds and change us as we allow his Word to penetrate into every area of our lives and bring us to the position where we fulfil these conditions, living in continual obedience to God and his Infallible Word.

INTRODUCTION

IF my people who are called by my name ...

Revival begins with the people of God. There is no question that we need to see our nation turn to God, but revival must first begin in the church. The word 'revival' is meaningless to the world. People outside of Christ need conversion, not revival. Revival refers to people who have grown cold, who have known the truth but have lost their grasp on it.

Charles Finney, one man greatly used of God in the 19th century to revive the church, defined revival as "the renewal of the first love of Christians, resulting in the conversion of sinners to God. It presupposes that the church is backslidden, and revival means conviction of sin and searching of hearts among God's people."

The call of God recorded in 2 Chronicles 7.14 is addressed to those who are known by God's name. It is intended for those of us who belong to the church of Jesus Christ. God is not speaking to the world at large. Here, his message is directed specifically to the people He names: 'those who are called by MY NAME.'

The reason for such a call may be simply stated: the people were not living as God required. God intends that his church should always have a godly, purifying influence on society, but when that influence declines, you can always trace the cause to a church that has allowed sin into its ranks and is not doing what God commands.

It is my belief that before we can hope to see any turning to God by the Australian people, the church must first get back to that place where God's Word is honoured and obeyed and the Holy Spirit is in complete control of peoples' lives. Revival can only come when WE do what God requires. To pray and ask God to change our nation when the people of God themselves are failing to do what God desires is a waste of time. Before God can reform our nation, the church needs to get its own house in order. To quote Finney again:

"Since a revival can never lay hold upon the world until it has first laid hold on the church, the need is for the fountains of sin to be broken up in the church. Backslidden Christians must be brought to repentance. They must have their faith renewed. Before the world can be moved, we must renew the image of Jesus Christ in ourselves. It is vain even to call the church to love others when the church has ceased loving Christ first."

The most significant word in this entire verse is the opening word 'if'. Everything that follows hinges on that one word. God is both willing and wanting to heal the land, but the fulfilment of the promise will not occur **until the conditions are met**. When we meet the conditions, THEN God will honour his promise.

When God sent a mighty revival to China in 1906-07, it began when Jonathan Goforth read a statement by Finney that it is useless for Christians to expect a revival simply by asking for it, without bothering to fulfill the laws which govern spiritual blessing. When Goforth read those words, he said:

"If Finney is right, then I am going to find out what these laws are and obey them, no matter what it costs!"

That is the sort of determination that is needed NOW by you and me. To sit back and pray and wait for God to send a revival is wishful thinking. Now, more than ever, is the time for action from the people of God.

If revival is conditional, then it is absolutely essential for us to understand what those conditions are, and then, by God's help, to meet them. In 2 Chronicles 7.14, **God names the four things we must do**, followed by the promise of **three things He will do!** Let us then proceed to examine the four conditions that God has set for **Revival**.

ONE

"If my people who are called by my name will HUMBLE themselves ..."

HUMBLING ONESELF

The first of the four conditions is for God's people to humble themselves. This strikes at one of the greatest hindrances to revival — the sin of pride.

All through the Bible, we have a continuous record of how the sin of pride has affected man's relationship with God. It was pride that originally caused Satan to lead the rebellion against God. It was through the temptation to pride that Satan seduced Eve. Most of the prophets speak of pride in one form or another. It is a universal disease. All humanity has been infected. God makes his attitude towards pride very clear:

"Whoever has a haughty eye and a proud heart, him will I not endure." Psalm 101.5

"The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: they will not go unpunished." Proverbs 16.5

"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." James 4.6 and 1 Peter 5.5

Pride reveals itself in many ways. It can be displayed without saying one word. Certain attitudes and actions can be the result of a proud heart. Some take pride in their appearance, others in their business. Pride may be spiritual, intellectual or social. We can be proud of our possessions or our achievements.

Not only is pride a major blockage to revival, but one of the most difficult of all sins to deal with, because it requires the removal of self, as the centre of our life, and replacing it with God. To do this requires the death of pride and all of us reluctant to give it up.

We may not see it but God knows that a proud church loses its sense of dependence on His power. It becomes self-sufficient and self-centred and thinks more of show and display than the needs of the world around it.

Of the urgent needs that confronts the people of God at present is to look at areas where pride has crept into Church. It is often disguised and, like a cancerous growth, takes root before you realise it. What are some some areas?

Pride in ourselves

In Revelation chapter 3, the Laodicean church provides us with several symptoms of pride which we see all too clearly people of God today.

"I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing" (3.17)

was their boast. No longer were they trusting in God. Their wealth and affluent life-style had taken their eyes off the Lord and onto things of this world. Their aim now was to get more possessions, greater luxury and enjoy good physical health. In their own eyes, they 'didn't need a thing' but in God's eyes, they were poverty-stricken, lukewarm, ready to be spat out of God's mouth.

I doubt whether there would be a church anywhere that would align itself with the Laodicean church. But a casual visit to an average church service presents a different picture. Sunday, the traditional day of Christian worship, has become the day to show off the latest fashions. How many of us, in all

honesty, spend more time on our clothes and in front of the mirror than we do getting our hearts ready for worship? Who really, are we trying to impress by our expensive jewelry and lavish clothes? Is there not pride in all of this? Have we ever considered what God must think of our fashion parade?

One characteristic of this world listed by John in his first letter is the boasting of what we own and what we do. Sadly, it seems, this trait has crept into the church. Just listen to an average conversation between the people of God and you will soon discover the most important thing in their lives. Jesus said:

"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." Matt 12:34

That is another way of saying that whatever means most to us in our lives will be the main topic of our conversation. That is why some people only talk about their business. Others talk of making money or of the latest clothes or car they have bought. With others, their main interest centres on their home or their sport.

In view of all this, what do you talk about? Do things of the Lord ever become the topic of conversation? Does Jesus ever get a mention?

Pride in the Ministry

Pride not only affects the average church-goer, but can reveal itself in those who serve in full-time ministry. I don't like saying it, but many preachers these days like to impress people with their talents. They parade around the platform with all the airs and graces of a celebrity, through their masterful piece of oratory, you hear the applause of the audience, and the preacher loves it!

They go on relating story after story of how many people **they** have won, how churches are always wanting **them** to preach and how many books **they** have written. They talk of being humble, but on the side groan when they are overlooked. If there is some success, they talk as if **they** did it.

The description given of the leaders in the time of Jesus so perfectly many preachers today: *"They loved the praise from men more than praise from God."* (John 12.43)

The late Dr A.W. Tozer attended a conference at one time, listening with patience day after day as preachers told of what **they** had done or how far **they** had travelled and what building they had opened. Finally, the good doctor rose to preach and fired a broadside at the boasters: "I tired of coming to conferences to watch men strut!"

I would only ask my brethren in the ministry: Who really are we trying to impress? Who are we fooling? Certainly not God. It appears we have forgotten the words of God Himself:

"I am the Lord, that is my name! I will not give my glory to another." (Isa 42.8)

If we are looking for the reason why revival seems a long way off, you have one answer right here. Man has stepped into the spotlight. He has taken centre stage. You hear it all the time: 'Give so-and-so a big hand' is the call to bring in the modern day preacher or singing group. We give a standing ovation with thundrous applause for **their** performance. Oh, they sang about God, they preached about God, but somehow, we failed to get the impression that God was there. (In fact, I wonder how many would have attended if the only attraction were **God!**)

We came away thinking how good the music was, how tremendous the preacher and the singing group was so talented. It was all so entertaining. But what of God and HIS greatness. What thoughts were left in our minds of the power, the splendour and the holiness of the Almighty? Did we gain any concept of God and his presence? All too often, we would have to say sadly, none at all, because the pride of man wants the glory and praise all for himself. To say we give all the praise to God means nothing when by our very actions, words and attitudes we have already taken all the glory.

What praise we do give to God is so often just hollow words. I sometimes wonder how much praise and honour we really do give to our God.

In the life of Evan Roberts, the man so greatly used of God in the Welsh revival of 1904, there occurred an incident which highlights clearly the pride in the ministry and giving glory to God. It was written by one who knew Mr Roberts personally. He says of him:

"He was willing to pay any price to see his Lord glorified and was often criticized for it. Others misunderstood him and his motives were misjudged; however, he was dead to such things when the glory of the Lord was at stake. While on the Island of Guernsey, he went one Sunday morning to a service at a large church. Someone recognized him and sent a note to the pastor. This dear brother allowed himself to be puffed up at having such a listener. When the message was over, the pastor solemnly declared himself and the church highly honoured to have such a man of God present. He then asked Mr Roberts to lead them to the throne of God in prayer. Everyone stood and waited. There was silence.

"The pastor, thinking that perhaps his request was not clear, repeated it. Everybody waited and there was silence again. The pastor repeated the request more loudly. Still there was no response. Someone spoke up, "Pastor, Mr Roberts left!" This simple lesson of giving all the honour to the Lord and his unwillingness to encourage human pride accomplished more (as I was told several times on that island,) than any sermon he could preach or any prayer he could offer."

Recently I read of an incident which occurred in the life of Henry Morehouse, a young minister greatly used of God to bring souls to Christ. He preached with great power in revivals in England and America. The writer continues:

In one of his meetings, however, everything was at a standstill. He gave himself to earnest prayer. "O God," he implored, "why am I not preaching with unction and power? Why are the people so unresponsive? Why are souls not being saved?"

God gave him the answer to his questions as he walked down a street. On a billboard, he read some flattering words about himself:

"Hear the most famous of all British preachers — Henry Morehouse!" God seemed to say to him, "That's why there is no revival."

He went immediately to those in charge of the meeting and said "No wonder we can't have a revival. No wonder the Holy Spirit cannot work. You have advertised me as the greatest this and the greatest that. The Spirit is grieved because we have not magnified the Lord Jesus Christ and ascribed all glory to his mighty name. He is the wonderful One. I am only a voice saying 'Behold the Lamb of God!'"

It seems this problem of pride and self is not a new characteristic of God's servants. Back in 1945, L.E. Maxwell (a former Principal of the Prairie Bible Institute) saw the problem clearly. In his book "Born Crucified" he wrote:

"The Church world is full of Christian professors and ministers, Sunday school teachers and workers, evangelists and missionaries, in whom the gifts of the Spirit are very manifest and who bring blessing to multitudes, but who, when known 'close up,' are found to be full of self. They may have 'forsaken all' for Christ and imagine they would ready, like the disciples of old, to die for their Master; but deep down in their hidden private lives, there lurks that dark sinister power of self."

Pride in OUR Church

Pride may not only be a personal thing, it can also be denominational. We can become proud of the accomplishments of **our** church. We like to think that our particular denomination has a unique role to play in the spiritual life of Australia. After all, are we not one of the few remaining churches that hasn't lowered its standard and still holds the Bible as the only authoritative Word of God? We may think that God has raised up our church to bring revival to this country. And that might be so. But I wonder if we become proud of it.

We be ever so careful of regarding ourselves as the custodians of New Testament Christianity, or of feeling of importance in being the only ones through whom God can bring a revival.

The late Dr Sangster, a Methodist leader in England for years, wrote these challenging words in 1957:

"We have boasted — in all denominations — of our traditions. 'Ours' is the only church which really goes back to the Apostles. 'Ours' is the established church. 'Ours' is the church which revived religion in the 18th century. 'Our' church is truly Bible-based. Is there nothing of pride in all this? Are we implying that we are more dear or near to God than his other blood-bought sheep?"

In her account of the Welsh revival, Jessie Penn-Lewis tells how God laid it on the heart of one man, Rev. Seth Joshua, to pray for a chosen instrument of God to lead a revival. She writes:

"In the brake that morning on the way to Blaenannerch, Mr Joshua told how it had been laid upon him four years before, to ask the Lord definitely to take a lad from the coal mine or from the field, even as He took Elisha, to revive his work in Wales.

He prayed God to raise an instrument whereby human pride might be humbled — not one from Cambridge, lest it would minister to their pride, nor one from Oxford University, lest it would feed the intellectualism of the Church.

Not once had this prayer been mentioned until this morning and it was then revealed, little knowing that the very instrument chosen of God was listening to the words."

When I read that, the thought came to mind: How would we really feel if God should choose a cleaner or a taxi-driver to be his chosen instrument to lead a revival in this country and seemingly bypass all the College-trained people, the clergy and other Church leaders? And what if God should choose someone who wasn't even a member of my denomination? It is easy to say we would rejoice, but deep down, we are hoping it will be someone from our church or denomination, and almost without realising it, pride has crept in!

Pride in Spiritual Experiences

We live in a time when a great deal of emphasis is being placed on obtaining a religious experience. Thousands are seeking the gift of speaking in tongues. Many go from church to church looking for a 'touch from God'. One of the disturbing trends of these seekers is the 'spiritual pride' that is so often the result. There is a feeling of superiority or 'I have arrived' type of attitude. Those who haven't had such experiences are looked down on as second-class Christians.

The comments made by Paul Smith in 1953 on 'spiritual pride' bear repeating. He says:

God cannot use the Christian who has begun to look down upon other Christians. There is no greater hindrance to revival than the man who feels he has attained spiritually and now stands head and shoulders above his brethren in the Lord. The man who has a consciousness of his own superiority in the things of the Spirit is a powerless Christian. The Christian who is proud is not spiritual and the Christian who is spiritual is not proud."

Enough has been said to indicate that pride has become a major obstacle to revival in the church. Like Peter of old, our eyes have shifted from the Lord to the world around us. Jesus himself warned that we were to be in the world but not of it.

We must admit though, that we have allowed the world to come into the church. Not only are we proud in ourselves, but of our abilities, our homes, our possessions, our churches and our past.

It has affected the whole spectrum of the Christian Church, from the leadership down. We must face the question, How could God, honestly, use a people who have become so full of themselves?

The truth is – He won't, until they learn to humble themselves!

*"God opposes the proud,
but gives grace to the humble."*

But what does it mean 'to humble yourself'? How do we humble ourselves?

The Humility of Jesus

My mind went to the example of Jesus referred to by Paul in Phil 2.2-8. Here was the great Creator who made Himself nothing, literally 'emptied Himself' to become a man. Here is a humility that stripped the Son of God, the Creator, of the glories and splendour of heaven. My mind dwelt on the words 'emptied Himself'. Is this the sort of humility that God requires of me, to be brought to a point where I am totally emptied of all the things that I consider mine, emptied of selfish desires and ambitions, emptied of the right to do as I please? What does Paul say? "Your attitude should be **the same as that of Jesus.**"

Paul continues: '**Taking the very nature of a servant.**' We know very little of servanthood in this country. A servant or slave had no rights of his own. He was totally the property of his master. He had to obey his master in every respect. It was to this status that Jesus came, the lowest of humanity.

"And being found in appearance as a man." Just imagine the great and all powerful God who has always existed, whose greatness extends beyond the universe, this God, confining Himself to a human body, which was also a product His creation. A body that got tired, hungry and thirsty. A body that was beaten, whipped and finally crucified on a cross. All this because Jesus humbled Himself. And it was all voluntary.

Then Paul adds:

"... and became obedient to death, even to death on a cross."

Here is the climax in the humility of our Lord. To condescend, not only to die, but to the most brutal and degrading of all tortures ever conceived in the minds of men, a punishment for the worst of slaves and criminals, crucifixion, nailed to a cross and then left hanging there to die. This is humility!

Is this level of humility impossible? Is it beyond us? Notice the words "humble yourselves". God would not have required such a response unless it were possible.

The Crucifixion of Self

The humility that God requires can be seen in the act of crucifixion. To be crucified in New Testament times must have been the most shameful and humbling of experiences known to man. Just to walk through the street carrying your cross, with crowds of people mocking and hurling insults, knowing full well that this was the end of your life. There was no escape now, no way out. You had to go through with it. You had to endure the agonising pain of huge nails being hammered through your wrist, watching your own blood pour out on the ground. Then you were lifted up, with the whole weight of your body hanging on those nails. And there you stayed, with no relief, no pain killers, no getting off that cross at the end of the day.

Crucifixion is ghastly in anyone's language. The person is humiliated beyond description, for it is a humility that ends in death. And yet, this is the humility that God requires of us — death of self.

The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 6.14:

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

In Paul's eyes, the world had been executed on a cross. All the attractions, the excitements and the things this world has to offer were all crucified. As far as Paul was concerned, they were dead. How do we respond to this? Do we still want the things of this world? How much do they mean to me? Lots of clothes in the latest fashion, all the latest things for the house etc. For Paul, everything in this world had been crucified. But then he adds:

"The world has been crucified to me and I to the world."

Paul is saying here: "I am dead to all the desires, the attractions, the pleasures, the possessions and standards of this world." The world could still entice, it could still advertise all the latest in fashions, entertainment, pleasures and possessions, but it was offering all this to a crucified man. How could he respond? He was hanging on a cross! He's finished! To the world, Paul was no better than a dead man. All his desires, ambitions, possessions, everything, had been nailed to the cross with him.

In the final analysis, the question we all have to face is: how much of this world have I died to? Are we dead to praise? Some people love to hear their name mentioned. It reminds them of what they have done.

Are we dead to fashion? Whenever we see the things of this world being advertised, is there a longing for the latest dress, or the latest model car or the latest gadget for the house? To the crucified person, there is no longing after these things, because they have died and dead people have no desires. Are we dead to opinion? What about the time when we were criticised? Did we react?

Are we dead to recognition? Do we feel uneasy or hurt when someone else gets the praise? Did we get annoyed when we were overlooked? Paul regarded himself as dead. "I have been crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2.19) A dead man has no ambitions, so Paul had nothing to be jealous about. A dead person has no possessions, so Paul had nothing to worry about. A dead person has no desires, so Paul had nothing to be anxious about. But is it possible for us to come to the point where we have been crucified to the world and the world crucified to us?

It is not only possible, it is the very thing our Lord Himself required for any who would be his followers.

*"If any would come after Me, let him deny himself,
take up his cross and follow Me." (Matt 16.24)*

The late Dr A. W. Tozer wrote on one occasion of a young believer who approached an older Christian with the question, "what does it mean to be crucified?"

"To be crucified," replied the mature believer, "means three things ...

- 1 The man on the cross is facing only one direction ...
- 2 He is not going back and ...
- 3 He has no further plans of his own ..."

Think about these three things. First, a crucified man is facing in only one direction. Too many Christians are trying to face two directions at the same time. They are divided in heart. They want heaven, but they are in love with the world.

Second, a crucified man is not going back. The cross spells finish for him. The drama is over. That is the finality of crucifixion. And the man who is crucified with Christ is not going back to his old life. It is over with, for ever.

Third, a crucified man has no further plans of his own. He is not dreaming of a bigger house or a better car. He is finished with this life.

Brokenness

Another way that God speaks of the humbling that needs to take place is by the word 'broken'. Usually, when something is broken, it loses its value and usefulness. Broken dishes, broken bottles, broken windows are all thrown away. But this isn't so in the spiritual realm. Before God can fully use a person, there must be this 'brokenness'.

*"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and a contrite heart,
O God, You will not despise."
(Psalm 51.17)*

But what does it mean to be broken? When Jesus held the last supper with his disciples, we read: "The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said

'This is my body which is (broken) for you.' (1 Cor 11.23-24)

The breaking of the bread was to represent the breaking of Christ's body on the cross, meaning the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus. The death of Christ was essential for an atonement for the sin of this world. And in a similar way, before God can use a person totally, there must be this brokenness, this death of self.

In his challenging book 'The Calvary Road', Roy Hession says:

"To be broken is the beginning of Revival. It is painful, it is humiliating, but it is the only way ... the Lord Jesus cannot live in us fully and reveal Himself through us until the proud self within us is broken. This simply means that the hard, unyielding self, which justifies itself, wants its own way, stands up for its rights and seeks its own glory, at last bows its head to God's will, admits it was wrong, gives up its own way to Jesus, surrenders its rights and discards its own glory, that the Lord Jesus might have all and be all. In other words, it is dying to self and self attitudes.

As we look honestly at our Christian lives, we can see how much of this self there is in each of us. It is so often self which tries to live the Christian life. It is self, too, which is often doing Christian work. It is always self which gets irritated, envious, resentful, critical and worried. It is self which is hard and unyielding in its attitudes to others. It is self which is shy, self-conscious and reserved. No wonder we need breaking. As long as self is in control, God can do little with us."

Humbleness in our Relationship to others

One of the visible effects of this death of self and humbleness of heart can be seen in our relationship with others. A major hindrance to revival is not opposition from outside the church, but disunity and dissension within. In church after church, people are openly critical of each other. Sunday dinner is frequently a meal of 'roast pastor'.

Members' meetings often end up an open forum for verbal attack, instead of a time of prayer and planning together. We talk of being united, but in reality it is only a dream. I have heard of some churches where the members refuse to even pray together. How Satan must be delighted with such churches! All the energy and attention of the people is taken up with infighting and squabbling.

How often has God's work come to a standstill because of the wrong attitudes of Christians toward each other. There is no way revival will ever come to a church where such attitudes persist. It seems we have forgotten the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness and acceptance of others. You hardly ever hear the words 'I'm sorry' or 'Forgive me' these days.

One of the unmistakable features of revival, whether big or small, is when God's people not only get right with their God, but get right with each other. This is what brings in the true unity that is spoken of in the New Testament. On the three or four occasions in my life where I have seen this happen, the congregation was greatly humbled before God and each other. Resentments and ill-feelings, some of which had been there for years, were gone in a flash. Members who couldn't get along or even speak to each other would be seen embracing in tears of confession and forgiveness. This was God at work.

Humble yourselves!

Notice carefully the wording in 2 Chronicles 7.14:

"If ... my people ... will humble themselves ..."

This is a clear command of God for something WE must do. And even though we can't do it without Him, God does not do it for us. It is our response that determines whether we are humbled or hardened.

Throughout God's Word, this requirement is seen time and time again:

In 2 Chron. 32.25-26 *"But Hezekiah's heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown to him ... then Hezekiah repented (AV humbled himself) of the pride of his heart, as did the people of Jerusalem."*

2 Chron 34.27 *"Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God when you heard what He spoke against this place and its people, and because you humbled yourself before Me and tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you," declares the Lord.*

Luke 14.11 *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

James 4.10 *"Humble yourselves before the Lord and He will lift you up."*

1 Peter 5.6 *"Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time."*

God cannot work where pride exists

And until we meet this first condition, no individual or church will experience the blessing of God. For revival to come there has to be this humbling, this death to self.

There is no other way.

May God forgive us for the pride in our hearts and grant us grace to change our ways and our attitudes until we are truly humbled before Him.

TWO

"If my people ... shall humble themselves and pray ..."

THE LACK OF PRAYER

*"If there was a revival of prayer among the people of God,
there would soon be a revival of blessing in the world ..."*

So wrote Jessie Penn-Lewis in the early part of this century. John Wesley said on one occasion that **"God does nothing except in answer to prayer,"** and yet with all we have heard about the importance of prayer, we Australians have largely remained a prayerless people. How many of us honestly would rate prayer at the top of our list of priorities? A recent survey indicated that the average pastor spends only five minutes a day in prayer. Is it any wonder we see so little happening when prayer has such a low rating amongst the leadership of the church. Consequently, this attitude continues right down through the membership of the church with the result that very few churches have a prayer meeting as part of their listed weekly programme.

'But I pray,' you may say. How much? How sincerely? How unselfishly? When did you stay up late or rise early just to pray? How much time do you spend in prayer each day?

In his latest book, 'Revival God's Way', Leonard Ravenhill writes:

"I see the churches expanding their building facilities; increasing their office space; adding a new wing or new building for a family centre, or for educational or recreational purposes; but I say again, I never see a church having to increase the size of the prayer room!"

Furthermore, he adds:

"If you are a church leader, God will hold you responsible for the spiritual state of your church. Maybe it is a prayerless church because it has a prayerless Pastor! Maybe it has no tears because its pastor and deacons have no tears."

I think there is little doubt that prayer has all but ceased in the lives of many Christians. But why is this? We have numerous books on prayer, prayer seminars, films on prayer, so what is the problem?

Gradually, we have lost sight of the importance and the power of prayer; hence the lack of it. And yet prayer, probably more than any other single feature, is the key element found in every revival in the church, and (dare I say it) the very one the modern church has left out!

Real Prayer is Powerful and Effective

James tells us that "the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5.16) This simply means that real prayer accomplishes something. It has powerful results. It's effective! It stands to reason that if we aren't seeing results, there has to be something wrong, either with our praying or with us! We only have to look at Elijah to see that real prayer has an incredible effect. We read in James that Elijah "prayed earnestly that it would not rain and it did not rain on the land for 3 1/2 years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain!" (James 5.17-18) What type of prayer is this where even the weather pattern is changed? Surely, if we could pray like this, we too could bring about such results so as to affect the whole nation.

Jessie Penn-Lewis writes:

"We have not understood the possibilities of this work of prayer. Prayer to many is something to be done when there is a bit of free time and even then but rarely. But prayer is a definite work, greater and vaster in its issues and greater than any other service to be done on earth, if the soul understood how to pray.

Elijah, a man of like nature with us, could thus pray and accomplish such work by his prayer that he could touch a whole country.

What we need is our minds open to the possibilities of such prayer and to set ourselves to know God, so that we could pray like Elijah."

The Prayer Needed for Revival

A revival is an unusual time of convicting power by the Holy Spirit of God. Alongside the Spirit of God however, are the forces of Satan working to counterfeit every manifestation of God. The type of prayer needed for such a situation calls for a degree of discernment and knowledge that very few possess.

After the Welsh revival of 1904, Evan Roberts, the man chosen of God to be the human leader of the movement, collaborated with Mrs Jessie Penn-Lewis to write a monumental book "War on the Saints".

Reflecting on events that took place during the revival, they became aware of the great spiritual battle we are in, and the type of prayer that is needed to overthrow the forces of darkness. They wrote:

"Those who pray for revival do not clearly understand what they pray for, nor how to act when their prayers are answered; for they are not prepared to meet the Satanic opposition to their prayers."

"The check to revival, both when it has begun, and in the prayer preceding its advent, is caused by the spirits of evil deceiving or hindering the praying ones."

All this may seem new to us. But unless we lay hold of this truth, our praying will be greatly limited and ineffective. Satan is called the 'god of this world' who has blinded the minds of men. He is in control of the whole world (1 John 5.19) and is in continual battle against God and the church.

The Spiritual Battle

Ephesians 6 tells us that we are in a spiritual war against the powers of darkness. We are told to put on

"the whole armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Eph 6.11-12

Anyone who has been in direct confrontation with Satan and his demons knows all too well that the battle we are in is REAL, believe you me! Satan is a real person. His demons are also real and the control they can exercise over people is not imaginary. When you meet the forces of evil head-on, it is like stepping into another world. Satan and his demons have tremendous power that most people in the church are totally unaware of. His control extends from individuals to whole nations. He can destroy people, homes and even churches that are not watching and praying. He can gain access into peoples' lives, even without their knowledge, for he is the master of deception and counterfeit. Even the strongest of Christians can be deceived by his clever counterfeits.

The war we are in is as real and as powerful as any physical battle, the only difference being it is a 'spiritual battle', that is, in the spirit world. And don't think for one moment that this conflict with the powers of darkness doesn't concern us here in civilized Australia. Satan has effectively kept the church in ignorance of his ways and powers by allowing us to think that all this talk of evil spirits, deceptions and satanic counterfeits doesn't occur in Australia, but in places like New Guinea or Bali. If we believe that, we have played right into Satan's hands.

Paul says the conflict we are in is against the **spiritual forces of evil**. You have to lose sight of flesh and blood in this battle. You cannot meet a spiritual enemy with your physical strength or intellect. You can only meet a spiritual enemy with spiritual power and that can be obtained only through prayer.

We must understand that when we pray for the salvation of people, we are actually attacking Satan's kingdom to capture his followers. And be certain of this, he will not take that sitting down. He will fight and use every means at his disposal to hang on to his people.

We may not realise it, but real prayer puts us in direct conflict with the forces of evil and in reality means we have openly declared war on the arch-enemy of God. As Leonard Ravenhill says:

"Prayer is not a preparation for the battle; it IS the battle."

In such a conflict, prayer becomes all important. In fact, it is the key to victory. To quote Jessie Penn-Lewis again:

"Prayer is the greatest conceivable weapon of destruction at the disposal of the believer, destroying obstacles to God's working either from sin, or from the works of the devil."

One example of this spiritual battle is when Israel fought against Amalek. Moses stood on a hill overlooking the battle-field, lifting up his hands while Joshua led the army into battle. When the hands of Moses went down, Amalek gained the ascendancy, but when he kept them raised, Israel prevailed. What was Moses doing this for? Jessie Penn-Lewis provides this explanation:

"To understand this, you must remember that the Bible says clearly that God dealt with all these nations in such judgment, because He had a war with the gods they worshipped. All through the scriptures, we are shown that idolatry is demon worship (1 Cor 10.19-20). At the back of the gods of the Canaanites lay the satanic forces, as today in every land where idols are worshipped."

"When the idolatrous heathen attacked Israel, Moses did not 'cry unto the Lord, but stood on the hillside and lifted the rod representing the power of God against the supernatural powers behind Amalek" (Eph 6.10). "The powers of evil attacking Israel through Amalek are the same forces against the church of Christ today."

The spiritual battle we are in makes it essential that the attitude we need to take in prayer is one of standing with God against the forces of Satan.

Training in the War of Prayer

No army will ever send out soldiers to battle who have not been trained in the use of their weapons. Yet we in the church find ourselves in a battle against Satan and his evil forces with next to no training in the use of our main weapon — prayer.

"If a systematic warfare of prayer against the forces of darkness is possible to the believer," writes Mrs Penn-Lewis, "such a warfare by prayer needs to be learnt as much as any other subject of knowledge ... such believers need not only to understand the intelligent use of the weapon of prayer, but to obtain

knowledge of the organised hosts of darkness ... the believer must learn to observe and learn by observation their methods in the war against the people of God."

It is not my intention to give a detailed study in this booklet of the type of praying needed in the spiritual war against Satan, but only to awaken us to the need for such prayer. For any who desire to go into this in depth, I recommend Jessie Penn-Lewis's book "War on the Saints" (unabridged edition,) especially chapter 11 'War upon the powers of Darkness' and chapter 12 'Revival Dawn and the Baptism of the Spirit.'

Binding and Loosing — Praying in the Will of God

Another important aspect of prayer is binding and loosing.

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mat 18.18)

Dr J. Edwin Orr has some very helpful comments on a right understanding of this verse: He says:

"The true sense is 'Whatsoever you loose shall have been loosed in heaven and whatsoever things you bind shall have been bound in heaven.' That does not mean that the believer decides what is to be done and then God has to ratify it. It is the other way round: one finds out what God's will is and then your releasing is in accordance with that."

Elijah is one example of such prayer, when he asked God to withhold the rain for 3 1/2 years, and then sent the rain after he had prayed again. Here Elijah closed the heavens, and opened the heavens. This clearly shows the binding and loosing of prayer. Jessie Penn-Lewis gives this word of challenge:

*"If you could learn to know God, so as to know the mind of God when God wanted such and such a thing done, you could pray like Elijah. Elijah both knew God and **he knew the will of God** so as to pray the prayer that worked for Israel. You too, could touch the whole country, yea, the whole world in the same way, if you knew God's will; for prayer **according to the will of God** 'availeth much in its working.'"*

This is so often overlooked in teaching on prayer. Leonard Ravenhill says in his book "Revival Praying":

"Prayer does not condition God, prayer conditions us. Prayer does not win God to our view, it reveals God's view to us."

Charles Finney said a similar thing in his Revival Lectures back in 1835:

*"Prayer produces such a **change in us as** renders it consistent for God to do as He would not do otherwise."*

This is the very thing the Apostle John taught in his first letter:

*"This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask **anything according to his Will**, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of Him." 1 John 5.14-15*

When our prayers are in line with the will of God, then we have the assurance that God will hear and answer our request. The key to answered prayer is to ask in the will of God. The important thing for us to learn is to be willing to be brought into step with the Will of God.

Revival Praying

A third aspect of revival praying is in the area of supplication, or pleading for people. In reading through Scripture and the history of revival, I came to see that the type of prayer we are accustomed to and the prayer that results in a genuine revival is on a different level. The old preachers called it 'soul burden' or 'travail of soul', terms we don't hear much these days.

Look at the Apostle Paul for example:

"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers." Rom 9.2-3

And again:

"Remember that for three years I never stopped warning you night and day with tears." Acts 20.31

Moses is another example:

"Please forgive their sin, but if not then blot me out of the book You have written!" Exod 32.32

Jeremiah also prayed in such a way and became known as 'the weeping prophet'.

When we look at such men, we can only ask ourselves: Do we feel as these men felt? Do we possess this sort of burden for others? George Whitefield, the great 18th century preacher prayed "perish George Whitefield, so that God's work might go on!" Similarly, John Knox prayed "Lord, give me Scotland or I die!"

Listen to the description of another man who had this burden and prevailed with God in prayer. His name is Evan Roberts, the man so greatly used of God in the Welsh revival of 1904-06:

"Day and night, without ceasing, he prayed, wept and sighed for a great spiritual awakening for his beloved Wales. Hours were spent in unbroken, untiring intercession to the disappointment of those who did not understand the symptoms and secrets of soul-travail ... Heavenly power swept over him as he pleaded for a lost world, lost beyond hope and no one to weep for it ... Prayer was the keynote of his tireless life. Nothing was ever done in the spirit of independence. No action taken or engagement entered into without definitely committing the matter to God. His soul appeared to be saturated through and through with the spirit of prayer. It was the atmosphere in which he lived and moved. For he enjoyed uninterrupted intercourse with heaven. Whenever one looked into his face, he seemed to be engaged in intercession. It was an object lesson to all. Prayer was the breath of his soul."

I ask, does our modern day church know anything like this? I don't know about you, but to me that type of praying is vastly different from what I know. I wonder if our generation has become so used to one form of prayer that intercession like this is unknown to the church of the 1980s. Is there anyone who prays like this now?

This I believe is one of the greatest missing ingredients in our praying. As I look at my own life and the church in general, I feel that the devil has effectively rendered the church powerless by getting our minds onto other things so that this deep concern for the lost and the church is crowded out. Our attention is taken up by a whole variety of concerns which in themselves seem important. Things that concern our family, the programme that we are involved in at our church and so it goes on. It appears we have become blinded to the seriousness of eternal issues. After all, this is a matter of life and death and people are going to hell, aren't they? Do we really believe that? We say we do, but our prayers don't match our beliefs. It seems our feelings have been numbed to sleep. We look at people all around us, but don't see them as lost and separated from God.

I think it is time we took our Bibles and read again those verses that talk about hell. We need to let our minds dwell on how awful it would be to hear those words:

"Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into eternal fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Matt 25.41

O God, show us the reality of the eternal world!

Persistence in Prayer

An important feature of effective prayer is a persistence to keep on praying until the prayer is answered. Jesus gave the parable of the persistent widow just to illustrate this one point. Luke records it:

*"Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them they should always pray and **not give up!**" (Luke 18.1)*

It is so easy to give up in praying for revival, especially when nothing seems to be happening. Even though God could send a revival immediately, it is usually some time before WE are brought to the place of total surrender and availability to God. In addition to this are the forces of Satan which wage a constant battle against the church. No battle has ever been won in a day and similarly, our battle with the 'spiritual forces of evil' will take much time and persistence in prayer.

In giving examples of this, Leonard Ravenhill writes:

"In an old town in Ireland, they'll show you with reverence a place where four young men met night after night after night praying for revival. In Wales, there's a place in the hills where three or four young men only 18 or 19 years old met and prayed night after night. They wouldn't let God go they would not take no for an answer. As far as humanly possible, they prayed a revival into birth. If you're thinking of revival at your church without any inconvenience, forget it! Revival costs a lot."

Jessie Penn-Lewis also gives many examples of people who persisted in prayer before the revival in Wales. She says of Evan Roberts: "For 11 years, he prayed for a revival." What persistence!

Hindrances to Prayer

There wouldn't be a Christian alive who is serious about prayer, that hasn't encountered many hindrances in their prayer life. If our prayers are to be effective we **must** overcome these hindrances. The first thing we need to do is to identify the major hindrances we will face:

1 Without a doubt, the greatest hindrance to prayer is **Satan himself**. The godly Samuel Chadwick wrote:

"The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray!"

Satan will do anything to keep us from prayer. He frequently whispers in our ear how tired we are and will remind us of a multitude of things we need to do, right at the time we intend to pray.

But the most deceptive trick of Satan in keeping God's people from real prayer is to provide them with 'spiritual experiences'. We seem to forget that one of the clever disguises Satan can use is as 'an angel of light'. (2 Cor 11.14) He can make an experience seem so real that even the most discerning of Christians can be deceived.

In my involvement in counselling people with occult problems, I have discovered that Satan and his demons love people to speak in tongues, especially in their private devotions. Why? Because it keeps them from praying. Anyone who believes that God has given them the gift of speaking in tongues should examine closely their experience to see if that has happened to them. Maybe Satan has given them a counterfeit tongue in answer to their request, just to keep them from the real ministry of prayer. Remember, if Satan can keep us from prayer, he can provide us with a vast range of manifestations and experiences as a diversion, all of which have the appearance of being genuine.

To illustrate the subtle deceptions of Satan in this area, I will include an account of an experience that happened to Evan Roberts during the Welsh revival of 1904-05. It is written by Professor I.V. Neprash (Founder of the Russian Missionary Service) who spent 8 months with Mr Roberts after the Welsh revival. He writes:

"It was his (Evan Roberts') custom to stay in the back room to pray after everyone else had gone into the service. He used this to prepare his heart in fellowship with God for the ministry of the Word immediately following.

"On one such occasion, he was greatly amazed to see the whole room filled with a supernatural light and he trembled at such a manifestation of the Heavenly Father. Encouraged by it, he went to the service and many souls were saved.

"This experience was on Wednesday. The Sunday following, he reached a city where a particularly decisive service awaited him. There was much empty curiosity and much opposition in this important city. A failure would strengthen the opposition; a victory would encourage the people of God. With this in mind, Evan Roberts knelt to pray in the back room after the others had gone to the platform. He felt a strong opposition from the enemy against which he struggled, but no break came. He began to feel the weight of the air, the room became so dark he felt it was as black as the darkness of Egypt. Twice the leader came for him. But he continued to pray.

*"Finally, without a sign of victory, he went to the platform. There was some blessing, because many others were also praying, but no visible victory. **The opposition rejoiced that night, for there was no overthrow of their forces.***

*"Months after this, while he was resting at Leicester and analyzing his experiences during the revival, he came to the conclusion that both of his experiences, the light as well as darkness, had come from the enemy. He could scarcely believe it. Yet, he could not escape the conclusion. Before this, every victory had been won on the basis of faith alone in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. **The strategy of the enemy to bring defeat at that important meeting was to switch him from the basis of faith and direct his attention to impressions and feelings.** To begin by trying to discourage him with darkness was useless, for his faith would remain unshaken. The unusual light accomplished the enemy's purpose. He confessed that after the experience of*

the supernatural light, he began to look for more manifestations and his position of faith was thus weakened. The experience of darkness came after he had already weakened himself by turning from the basis of faith to that of impressions."

Such an experience highlights the danger of looking for visible manifestations and signs and relying on feelings. In the end, we find ourselves walking and praying by sight and not by faith.

2 A second hindrance to prayer is in the **hurried lifestyle** we have grown up with. Dr Earle Wilson (General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Church) said recently:

"The hindrances to prayer are not the big things like intellectual difficulties but the little things like making a place and appointing a time for a silence in the busyness of life. For most of us, prayer is not reasoned out of our lives, it is simply crowded out.

"We have not yet learned how to live with our accelerated civilization. The speed of life is hostile to the spirit."

3 A third hindrance comes back to a **wrong attitude**.

The type of praying that brings in revival means you are out of the public eye, you are not in the spotlight. Your name is not mentioned, you receive no recognition (on earth). It means that a lot of your time and energy is spent in private and people won't see much of the person who spends time alone with God.

All this is contrary to the way we act and the way other people expect us to act. We seem to think that our visible service for God is more important than that which isn't seen. We rush here and there all the time thinking we should be seen doing something. But when a person spends time alone with God, you can't see that. And I suspect that **we want others to see how much we do**.

It is important to remember that Jesus said:

"When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen. Then your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." (Matt 6.6)

Why this praying in secret? Because you can't show off to anyone. You can't impress others with your eloquent prayers. You can't display your gifts. Nobody is there, except you and God, and God doesn't look for outward performance.

4 A major hindrance to answered prayer is **sin**. The Psalmist said:

*"If I had cherished sin in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened."
(Psalm 66.18)*

James says that *"the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."* (James 5.16) The essential characteristic of the person who prays effectively is that he is righteous, that is, living in a right relationship with God. Anybody can pray, but only the prayers of people who are continually walking in a right relationship with God and are not harbouring any known sin will be effective.

How can we expect God to grant our requests when we have not obeyed Him in all areas of our life? Herein lies one of the main reasons why prayer is not answered.

5 Another hindrance to effective prayer is **wrong motives**. James reminds us:

"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives." (Jas 4.3)

God alone knows the true motive behind every prayer. Even in praying for revival, a wrong motive can be the source of the prayer. For example, we may ask God for a revival so that our church might grow and numbers increase. "What's wrong with that?" you ask. An increase in numbers should not be our aim in prayer. It may be the result of it, but it should never be the basis of true prayer. We may ask such prayers with the thought of how much our church will be benefited and what a revival will do for our denomination. Is there not a selfish motive behind all this? Doesn't God have dedicated followers in all denominations? Why should I think that mine is so special and deserves favoured treatment from God? Have I ever asked God to move in the hearts of others outside my own church and denomination?

James adds a further thought: *"that you may spend it on your pleasures."* The word 'pleasures' refers to anything we may delight in for our enjoyment. All too often, our focus in prayer is on things for our benefit. It could be anything, maybe a trip abroad, or something new for the house. Such requests may seem reasonable enough, but frequently, that's the extent of our praying. It is centred around me. Grandma may get a brief mention and a missionary or two, but the rest of our praying comes right back to my little world of personal concerns or 'pleasures' as James calls it. We are so much like those three men (in Luke 9) who said they would follow Jesus but added the words *"let me first go and ..."*

Each of us can do a quick check on how much of self there is in our praying by noting how many times we say 'I'. This is not saying we shouldn't ask God at all to do things for us, but rather it is an attempt to make us look at **what** we ask for and **why**. Think on these ...

Will our request bring glory to God? Will the name of Jesus be truly honoured and not mine? Will it help me grow in my Christian life? Will others be brought to Christ as a result of my praying? These are questions we should continually ask ourselves.

James would not have mentioned these hindrances to prayer unless they were real. If your prayers are continually in the unanswered category, then maybe James has a word for you.

Recently I came across these challenging thoughts by the late Dr A.W. Tozer. It left me re-examining the real motives behind my praying. Read carefully what he says, don't rush through it. Rather, read it with an open heart and allow God to show you what motives govern your prayer life.

"Selfishness is never so exquisitely selfish as when it is on its knees. Self is the serpent in the garden, the golden wedge in the tent of Achan, and it renders every prayer ineffective until it is identified and repudiated.

Self turns what would otherwise be a pure and powerful prayer into a weak and ineffective one.

I may, for instance, pray earnestly for the glory of God to be manifested to this generation of men, and spoil the whole thing by my secret hope that I may be the one through whom He manifests the glory.

I may cry loudly to God that the church be restored to her New Testament splendour, and secretly dream that I may be the one to lead her in; thus I block the work of the Spirit by my impure motive. My hidden desire for a share of the glory prevents God from hearing me. Self, all bold and shameless, follows me to the altar, kneels with me in prayer and destroys my prayer before it is uttered.

It is possible to want the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt, but to want to be known as the Nehemiah who rebuilt them. It is possible to want the prophets of Baal

defeated, but to dream of being the Elijah who stands dramatically on the mount to call down the fire for all the world to see. My strong desire for a new reformation within the church may be rendered void by my secret desire to be known as another Luther.

Did you ever pray that the armies of the Lord might win in the mighty struggle against the flesh and the devil and catch yourself daydreaming about riding in an open car while the grateful church stages a hero's welcome?

If you are a minister, have you ever dreamed of a sea of eager faces hanging on your every word?

If you are a Christian businessman, have you ever let your mind wander over your mighty prayers for success in business, the dramatic answer, the proud testimony, maybe the book with your picture on it?

Then you know what it is to be hit where it hurts worst; you know what it is to be attacked where you are most defenceless.

*Too often we pray for right things but desire the answer for wrong reasons, one reason being a desire to gain a reputation among the saints. Long after every hope of getting on the cover of **Time** magazine has ebbed away from our hearts, we may still harbour the unconfessed desire to get on the cover of **Christian Life**. That is, if the world will not appreciate our sterling worth, then the church will! If we cannot enjoy the reputation of being a great politician or actor or footballer, we will settle for a big reputation as an unusual Christian. That is to desire flesh instead of manna; and God may send leanness to our souls as a result.*

The peril of prayer

Nothing is so vital as prayer, yet a reputation for being a mighty prayer warrior is probably the most perilous of all reputations to have.

No form of selfishness is so deeply and dangerously sinful as that which glories in being a man of prayer. It comes near to being self-worship; and that while in the very act of worshipping God.

What then shall we do?

We must deny self, take up the cross and count ourselves expendable.

We must cease to exercise the world's judgments and try to think God's thoughts after Him.

We must reckon ourselves dead to gain and glory and allow ourselves to become inextricably involved with the cross of Christ and the high honour of God.

Then our prayers will be something like this: O God, let thy glory be revealed once more to men: through me if it please Thee, or without me or apart from me, it matters not. Restore thy church to the place of moral beauty that becomes her as the Bride of Christ: through me, or apart from me; only let this prayer be answered. O God, honour whom Thou wilt. Let me be used or overlooked or ignored."

6 The sixth hindrance to effective prayer is our **lack of knowledge and faith** in the promises of God.

In my study of the great revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, I discovered that one of the reasons why millions were brought into the Kingdom of God was that God's people in general and the leaders in particular had such a strong faith in the Promises of God.

Charles Finney taught that the fulfilment of the promises depended on 3 steps:

- 1 Knowing the promises
- 2 Understanding them
- 3 Believing them

We can't **believe** them, he taught, unless we **understand** them and we can't understand them unless we **know** them. And that is where so many in the church have fallen short. I ask, how many promises could you recite from memory? Ten, five, or not even five? And yet we can quite easily remember the names of sporting personalities, movie stars, the scores of last week's football match and what is happening in the latest TV serial. The truth is that we can't be bothered even to make an effort to learn and memorise the promises found in God's Word. It's too much like hard work. It's much easier to curl up in a soft lounge chair and watch TV.

Is it any wonder we have thousands of Christians who don't know their Bibles. The fact is they hardly read them, let alone memorise them. Compare for instance how much time you spend each day in reading God's Word and watching TV. For whichever occupies the most time indicates what is more important in your life.

In an article entitled 'The Tyranny of the Urgent' Charles Hummel states:

"When we stop to evaluate, we realize that our dilemma goes deeper than a shortage of time; it is basically the problem of priorities."

All of us must admit that we can find time to do the things we really want to do. As Hummel suggests, what it really boils down to is a question of priorities. If we believe that reading and studying God's Word is of the utmost importance, we will make the time to read it. If not, we may get around to it, if we are not too tired and have some time left over.

I don't think we realise the effects that this lack of knowledge of God's Word has had on the church. God said through the prophet Hosea: *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* In Australia at the present time, I fear we have reached a situation of having a church where its members have very little knowledge of what they believe. I sometimes wonder how many who call themselves Christians could show from the Bible the way of salvation. Could you?

The effects of such a lack in knowledge can be disastrous. For instance, very few know their Bible well enough to be able to refute the claims of the cults. As a result, our people are sitting ducks for the lies of the enemy, simply because they do not know what the Bible teaches.

It is a fact worth remembering that many of the converts to the cults are people from mainline Protestant churches. Why is this? I believe that if our people were taught properly and knew their Bibles well enough, they could detect the difference between truth and error.

This deficiency also reflects in the prayer life of the church. All too often, we do not claim a promise from God for the simple reason we do not know them. Not only must we hang our head in shame, but ask the Lord to forgive us for this negligence.

Our prayers will only become effective as in faith we claim the promises, and that in turn depends on whether or not we know them.

Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, was once asked: "What is the need of the hour?" He replied:

"I believe it is an army of soldiers, dedicated to Jesus Christ, who believe not only that He is God, but that He can fulfil every promise He has ever made and that there isn't anything too hard for Him."

May the Lord put within each of us a new hunger for his Word, and a desire to know the many promises of God, to understand them and then to believe that God means what He says.

7 The last hindrance is more correctly called **neglect** or put another way, we-just-don't-pray! James says:

"You do not have because you do not ask!"

We should ask ourselves: have we asked at all? Did we keep on asking or did we give up after one or two attempts? More than likely, we haven't asked at all, but even when we do it is so often a half-hearted effort that God knows we don't really mean what we say. Let's face the truth.

For many of us, prayer is not an important part of our lives. As Leonard Ravenhill so pertinently said in his book 'Revival Praying':

"We pray to God, if we are not too tired; we go to the prayer meeting, if it is not raining; we pray for the heathen, if we are constantly being jabbed by prayer circulars."

It is a fact that we do the things we really want to do. And if we don't pray on a regular basis, the truth is we don't want to do it. It is time we stopped offering all sorts of excuses as to why we don't pray. **We can** do it, if we really want to!

The Way to Change

The first step we need to take is to grasp the fact that prayerlessness is a sin. P.T. Forsyth once said: "The worst sin is prayerlessness." Samuel said to King Saul:

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you." 1 Samuel 12.23

The root of all sin is selfishness -- that independence from God. Charles Hummel comments:

"When we fail to wait prayerfully for God's guidance and strength, we are saying, with our actions, if not our lips, that we do not need Him. How much of our service is characterised by 'going it alone?' ... prayerful waiting on God is indispensable to effective service."

If prayerlessness is a sin and we are guilty of omitting this vital ministry, then our urgent need is to confess to God our negligence and then return to that place of secret prayer.

The **second step** is to look again at the importance of prayer and what it has accomplished in years gone by.

In any study on prayer, the life of Jesus stands as an example of the importance of prayer. Luke is very specific in his record on the prayer life of Jesus. The other gospels say that Jesus was in the Jordan

when He was baptized. Luke records that this happened “*as He was praying*”. Again, the other evangelists say that Jesus chose his twelve disciples, but Luke adds that it was after He “*spent the night praying to God*”. In fact, Luke shows us the real source of Jesus' power when he wrote “*Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*”

The Transfiguration took place as Jesus was praying, for we read “He went up into a mountain to pray.” When his disciples asked the Lord to teach them to pray, again it was when ‘Jesus was praying’. Before his crucifixion, Jesus spent much time in prayer. Luke says ‘and being in anguish, He prayed more earnestly.’ Even on the cross, we find Jesus praying for those who persecuted Him.

It was his regular practice to pray. And there lies the importance of prayer to you and me, for if Jesus needed to spend so much time in prayer, don't we need time in prayer? If Jesus needed to pray in a crisis, don't you and I need it in every crisis?

*“The record stands,” says Ravenhill,
“that the men who prayed most accomplished most.”*

Charles Finney is one example. He said:

“Unless I had the spirit of prayer, I could do nothing. If even for a day, or an hour, I lost the spirit of grace and supplication, I found myself unable to preach with power and efficiency or win souls by personal conversation.”

History bears record that **every** revival in the church, whether great or small was brought into being through prayer. But like Israel of old, we soon forget what God has done and how God's power was brought into operation.

The **third step** is to make prayer a daily priority in our lives, and keep it that way. This will be the hardest to maintain.

“Over the years,” says Hummel, “the greatest continuing struggle in the Christian life is the effort to make adequate time for daily waiting on God.”

Hummel's comment bears repeating that ‘our dilemma goes deeper than a shortage of time; it is basically the problem of priorities.’ That hits the nail right on the head. It all boils down to how important we believe prayer really is.

If prayer is priority number one, it will take first place in our lives. If prayer is not a priority, it is then relegated to the spare-time slot of the day.

The KEY to Effectiveness and Power

For many years, I have read the lives of great men and women who knew the power of God. I wondered what it was that made them such a force. Some were very gifted, but others were just ordinary people with no great abilities at all, except that **they possessed the power of God**. What was their secret?

In his “Power from on High”, Finney answers that in one line: **“Personal intercourse with God is the secret!”**

He further states:

*“I have infinitely more hope of the usefulness of a man who, at any cost, will keep up **daily intercourse with God**, who is yearning for and struggling after the highest possible spiritual attainment, who will not live without daily prevalence in prayer and being clothed with power from on high.”*

In another old book, Horatius Bonar says the same:

*"Nearness to Him, intimacy with Him, assimilation to his character - these are the elements of a ministry of power. Our power in drawing men to Christ springs chiefly from the fulness of our personal joy in Him and the nearness of **personal communion with Him** ... a ministry of power must be the fruit of a holy, peaceful, loving **intimacy with the Lord...** this is the grand secret of ministerial success. One who walks with God reflects the light of his countenance upon a benighted world; and the closer he walks, the more of this light does he reflect."*

"What can we plain Christians do to bring back the departed glory?" asks Dr Tozer.

*"Is there some secret we may learn? Is there some formula for personal revival we can apply to the present situation, to our situation? The answer to all these questions is **yes**. The secret is an open one, which the wayfaring man may read. It is simply the old and ever new counsel:"*

"Acquaint yourself with God. The man who wants to know God must give time to Him!"

If we regard prayer as important and essential, then **we will make the time** to have that daily communion with God.

THREE

"If my people ... shall humble themselves and pray and SEEK MY FACE ..."

For anyone who is longing for God to move among his people, it is not enough just to have humbled themselves and prayed. To give oneself to such a task requires a commitment that encompasses every aspect of your life.

Dr Tozer wrote that there can be "no revival without reformation." He goes on to say that:

Unless we intend to reform, we may as well not pray. Unless praying men have the insight and faith to amend their whole way of life to conform to the New Testament pattern, there can be no true revival.

We must have a reformation within the church. To beg for a flood of blessing to come upon a backslidden and disobedient church is to waste time and effort. A new wave of religious interest will do no more than add numbers to the churches that have no intention to own the lordship of Jesus and come under obedience to his commandments. God is not interested in increasing church attendance unless those who attend amend their ways and begin to live holy lives.

Prayer for revival will prevail when it is accompanied by radical amendment of life; not before. All-night prayer meetings that are not preceded by practical repentance may actually be displeasing to God. 'To obey is better than sacrifice' (1 Samuel 15.22).

The third condition set down by God is really an examination of what we are seeking for in our daily lives. We are told to 'seek God's face'. The first question we need to answer is: What does it mean by the phrase 'seek my face'?

In Old Testament times, whenever the Lord was pleased with the conduct of his people, his pleasure was expressed by saying that his face was turned towards them. If the people were disobedient to the commands of God, his face was turned away from them.

"The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry; the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Psalm 34.15-16

During a period of apostasy, when the people of Israel had turned their backs on God, Isaiah spoke out:

"Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so that He will not hear." Isaiah 59.2

"When God tells his people to seek his face," writes Paul Smith, "He is urging them to live in such a way that his face can be turned in their direction and at all times, they can enjoy the smile of the Lord because they are living in the centre of his will. This is the third condition for revival. The Christian who is revived is the Christian who is living in the centre of God's will. God cannot use the man who is out of line with Him."

One of the great revivals recorded in the Word of God took place in the fifteenth year of Asa's reign over Judah. The reason for the success of this revival is recorded in 2 Chronicles 15.12:

"They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul."

This covenant to 'seek the Lord' was made 'with all their heart and soul'. There were no half measures. It was a total commitment.

What are we seeking?

As I look at our Australian church, I honestly wonder how many Christians are really seeking a deep moving of God's spirit in reviving his church. It should be the heart-cry of every Christian, the focal point of our prayers and one of the main themes echoed from the pulpits across the land. But is it? It doesn't appear so. I hear very little talk about it, almost no prayer directed towards that end and the preaching is on every other subject except getting right with God.

Dr Oswald J. Smith pinpoints our problem with this observation:

*"That which I saw in continental Europe, I have yet to see here, namely, **hunger**. My friends, there is no real, true, deep, spiritual hunger in this country; no heart searching after God. **Things** fill our vision. We have so many comforts and even luxuries that we do not feel our need of God. If we were to be stripped of almost everything we possess, it might prove to be our salvation.*

"People here do not want to attend meetings. Often times, it takes hundreds of dollars' worth of advertising to even interest them.

"The theatres and moving picture shows are thronged; the dance halls, beaches and parks, crowded, but our churches, for the most part, are empty. People would never dream of walking even ten miles to attend a service; nor would they stand in the open air to hear the gospel. Hence my diagnosis that there is no hunger."

That was written in 1933. Sadly, we have come another 50 years since then and still the situation remains much the same. Is it any wonder we don't see revival!

If we take a hard look at our lives, it is quite possible we will see a totally different picture of the things we are really seeking. Many are seeking for some type of spiritual experience. They have been told they must speak in tongues and so that becomes their main goal.

Others seek a miracle. It may be a healing, and so they do the rounds of various churches seeking a cure for some physical problem.

Then again, others seek bigger and better things for the comforts of life. They believe God has promised to bless them abundantly and given them whatever they may desire ... a type of spiritual Aladdin's lamp. Just rub the Lord with a little prayer and you can get anything you want.

In recent years, we have had a whole new movement spring up, based on this teaching. As children of the King, some preachers are saying we should expect to be prosperous. If our faith is strong enough, we can get anything we want from God.

When we stop and reflect on the many things we are seeking in our daily lives, it becomes all too revealing that it centres around things **we** want or something we ask God to do for us. All our prayers, our plans, our money, are focused on the most important person in the world — **me!**

Yes, we are seeking all kinds of things, but are we seeking to know and to do the will of God in every area of our lives?

The Mark of the true seeker – Obedience

One of the main characteristics of the person who is seeking to do God's will in all areas of their life is a desire and a willingness to obey God in everything.

Samuel said to King Saul:

"To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams." 1 Samuel 15.22

I know of no substitute for obedience. As love is the mark of a true disciple of Christ, so obedience is the evidence of that love. In his first letter, the apostle John lays before us one of the great promises of God's Word.

"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases Him." 1 John 3.21-22

Some have read these verses and have mistakenly assumed that we can receive anything we want. But they overlook the fact that there are several conditions. The first is that we have a heart that does not condemn us, a conscience void of offence to God and man and that we are not harbouring any secret sin. The second is "because we **obey his commands.**" What commands is he referring to? When the Apostle speaks of 'His commands', he means the commandments of Christ. He is not talking here about the law of Moses or the ceremonial law in the Old Testament. The promise contained in this verse is conditional on our obedience to the commandments of the Lord recorded in the New Testament. If we hope to see God fulfil this promise, then it becomes absolutely essential for us to know the commands of Christ, and then diligently keep them.

Let us look briefly at four of these commands which highlight some things we may be seeking in our lives:

Where is your treasure?

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matt 6.19-21

These verses do not present us with an option. It specifically says "Do not lay up for yourselves ..." That is a command in anyone's language. But have we obeyed it? It doesn't appear so! We have filled our homes with every possible thing we can buy, ornaments, expensive clothes, furs and jewelry, all of which is of no benefit to the kingdom of God. How can we honestly justify what we are doing when God's work around the world cries out for support? A missionary, for example, comes home on furlough and is in need of support to return to the field, and yet we have all the money he needs tied up in things around the house that we hardly ever use and don't need anyhow. Our Christianity is really a sham when we ask God to provide funds for his work, when we ourselves could provide the money with the stroke of a pen. If we regard ourselves as stewards of the Lord's money, then is it not robbing God to withhold money which rightfully belongs to the Lord?

The accumulation of things and wealth can lead to other problems which very few of the Lord's people are able to see. Many unsaved, for instance, see a glaring inconsistency in those who profess to follow Jesus indulging themselves in magnificent homes, luxurious boats and cars and expensive clothes. The wealth of the church does not add up with the cry of the poor and needy of this world. And Scripture says exactly the same:

"If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need, but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?" 1 John 3.17

Another reason against storing up treasure on earth is that it makes the life of faith practically impossible. Why? Because it is very hard to have riches and not trust in them. It can also be detrimental to our prayer life. Because we live in a country where we can easily get any material thing we desire, we may well ask ourselves — why pray?

What do we need to trust God for? We have everything as it is. All the verses in the Bible that talk about self-denial don't seem very relevant when we are living in luxury and comfort.

We should also look closely at the example it sets for children and new Christians. Without saying a word, we can give the impression that it is our God-given right to accumulate wealth. After all, if God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, surely we should expect to be rich also.

And so we look for and expect to acquire all things we can afford to buy, until eventually we accept it as part of our way of life.

We need to be continually reminded that all these 'precious things' of ours will one day be left behind when our earthly life is finished 'for we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can take nothing out.' (1 Tim 6.7) In fact, at the end of this world, everything will be destroyed by fire (see 2 Peter 3.7) and then what will become of our treasured possessions?

When John Wesley died, it was recorded that he left behind:

a worn out old preacher's Bible
a cloak
a library of books and
something else - oh yes ...
the Methodist Church!

As far as earthly possessions are concerned, we don't remember Wesley at all. But for the thousands who were brought into the Kingdom of God as a result of his life's ministry, **that** is what he is remembered for!

And what will you and I be remembered for? All the things we owned? Remember, that of all the vast wealth of Solomon, there is not one trace of any of it that is left behind! Treasures on earth **do not last!**

They rust, they decay, thieves steal them. On the other hand, the Lord tells us to seek treasure in heaven by investing our lives in things that do last and the only thing we know for certain that will last when this world finally ends is the souls of men and women. Everything else will be destroyed!

Someone once wrote:

*"What thoughts of earth will I enjoy on heaven's shore?
the car I drove?
the house I owned?
the clothes I wore?
... none of these ... but this:
I lead a soul to Christ!"*

Conforming to the Pattern of this world

"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed, by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and prove what God's perfect will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12.2

This is not to be taken as just good advice, but as a direct command not to allow ourselves to be squeezed and forced into the pattern of this world. But have we kept this command? How many of us in the church have adopted the attitude that we MUST dress in the latest fashion, we MUST have the latest model car and we MUST have the most modern furniture. We seem to accept without question that because others have all these things, we should have them too. And without thinking it through and praying about it, we rush out and help ourselves to all the latest attractions as if it were our God-given right.

Is it any wonder the world doesn't take us seriously? We are caught up in the same rat-race as they are.

If we intend to keep this command and the previous one mentioned in Matthew 6, we should start by asking ourselves: Does God really want me to have this? Can I use it for his glory? Is it going to extend his kingdom in some way here on earth? Am I being drawn in by the advertising gimmicks of this world? Or could I forego it and give the money I would have spent to the Lord's work?

Separate from the World

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?"

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people.' Therefore — come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you." 2 Cor 6.14-17

It is of great concern that Christians all over the country are attending things that are not only questionable, but even forbidden by God! What in the world is happening to the church when God's 'holy' people are found in such places as seances, rock concerts, discos and dance halls?

If you think I am over-reacting, read again the questions the Apostle Paul addressed to the Corinthian church. These five questions show that some of the Corinthian believers were in close relationship with the non-Christian world, which was both wicked and absurd, and if not quickly dealt with, would inevitably lead to a final apostasy.

Some apply these verses to Christian people marrying non-Christians, but that is only part of the application. These verses cover **any** and **every** association between a Christian and a non-Christian.

The book of Proverbs abounds with references to avoid the company of evil companions and associations, as they will only drag you down.

The Church has lost sight of the implications of what will happen when we do not separate ourselves from non-Christian associations. The most detrimental effect is on the Christian himself. If we are frequently mixing and associating with the followers of satan, then almost without realising it, we adopt the language, the standards, attitudes and malpractices of the world. The old saying still holds true: 'You become like the company you keep!'

Not only will it affect us personally, but our family, relatives, friends and church. But the worst effect on a Christian's life is that it leaves the door wide open for Satan to come in and take control in one form or another, which eventually leads down the path to ruin. And this is not far-fetched language! It is happening to thousands of Christians right across the country and the situation is getting worse every day.

Paul Smith makes a very relevant point in saying that:

"Thousands of God's children find themselves impotent for this very reason. Church after church has lost its testimony because there is no longer any distinction between its members and the men and women of the world, instead of raising the standards and thus regaining their power from God, the policy of most churches has been to lower the standards to increase their membership. In the early church, anything that was in any way tainted with the world was considered wrong, but today, sin has been white-washed to make the church easy of access. The apostolic Christian was anxious to get as far away from the world and the things of the world as he could. The modern Christian seems to be most concerned about how far into the world he can go and still be safe. Such a Christian differs only in name from the man of the world, and has little, if anything, to offer to him. How then can his testimony be effective?"

The commands of the Lord given here in 2 Corinthians are still as binding as when first given. To the real follower of the Lord Jesus, such commands are not optional. Hear them again:

"DO NOT be yoked together with unbelievers. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you."

In Love with the World

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. For everything that is in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he is, has and does, comes not from the Father, but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."
1 John 2.15-17

As covetousness is one of the predominant vices of this age, this command of the Lord is very specific. It is important to note that the words 'do not love' in the original Greek indicate that the reader should either stop doing it or refrain from beginning the habit. There are three reasons set forth why the Christian should not love the world.

(i) You cannot love the world and love God too. The love of God and the love of earthly things are incompatible. It is an either/or situation. You either love God or the world. You cannot love both.

(ii) The perverted desires of sinful man do not belong to God but to the world.

(iii) Both the world and its desires are passing away.

The question we need to answer is: What is **worldliness**? How do you define it? Are there some guidelines whereby we may determine what is of the world? Worldliness is one of those areas where its symptoms will vary from country to country. Things which we might regard as worldly may not even exist for Christians in the highlands of New Guinea or the villages of India.

But wherever we live, the principles laid down in the Word of God remain the same. The Apostle John mentions three:

- 1 The cravings of sinful man
- 2 The lust of the eyes
- 3 The boasting of what he has and does

Look at these more closely:

1 The cravings of sinful man. What cravings is John referring to? The Amplified Version says: 'Craving for sensual gratification.' In our Australian society over the last two decades, we have had an explosion of sex books and magazines, sex shops, sex films, sex camps and sex crimes. Homosexuality, lesbianism and nudity have nearly become accepted lifestyles. Our TV and beaches openly display these things as if they were a virtue. Is it any wonder that so many of our young people are drifting into the sex and drug world. It's all round them. What hope have they got? To the Christian, the Word of God is very definite and clear:

*"It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should **avoid sexual immorality**; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God ... the Lord will punish men for all such sins." 1 Thess 4.3-6*

(More will be said on this in the next chapter.)

2 The Lust of the eyes. It is not sinful for the eyes to see, but through temptation our eyes can lead us into all sorts of sin. And there is no shortage of enticing things and pleasures that satan will bring before our eyes: beautiful clothes, magnificent homes, in fact, anything our eyes lay hold of can become a temptation.

Herein lies an inherent danger for God's people, that through the eye-gate, we lose that sensitivity to sin. Some years ago, Dr Billy Graham mentioned television as one of the chief culprits in this area. He said:

"I think television is having a detrimental effect on Christians. They are no longer sensitive to sin! Television has brought the night club into the home along with violence and sex things which Christians looked upon ten years ago with abhorrence. They are gradually becoming desensitized and I can cite case after case where Christians now watch these things on television without feeling any twinge of conscience!"

Whatever has happened to us? Instead of becoming alarmed and distressed at sin, we have become callous and indifferent! Could it be that we have become so used to seeing these things that our response mechanism has been short-circuited? It just doesn't work any more. It's like going into a dimly-lit room from bright sunlight. Before long, however, your eyes get used to the dark. Tragically, it seems that too many of God's people have become 'used to the dark'. The light that Jesus intended them to be is but a dim flicker. Maybe it has even gone out. We need to be reminded of the song our children sing in Sunday School: 'Be careful little eyes what you see.'

3 The boasting of what he has and does

Are we guilty of this? I hesitate to answer, but I fear so! How we love to tell of **our** achievements, **our** ancestry, **our** position, **our** rewards, **our** experiences or our possessions. Are we not like the world in this respect?

All of this, says John, is of the world. Furthermore, he adds, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." 1 John 5.19 Here is the reason why the world is in the horrible state that it is. Satan controls it. And the more you and I allow ourselves to go the way of the world, the more we will come under Satan's control. Thus the command NOT to love the world!

"But the man who does the will of God lives forever."

It is not enough just to **know** God's will. We must **do it**. The command has been given. If we mean business with God, we will **obey**. These commands of Christ are just as binding and just as important as the 10 commandments given to Moses. It was John Wesley who said:

"It is the same God who said 'do not steal' and 'do not kill' and 'do not commit adultery who said 'do not pile up treasures on earth.'"

I think it has become shamefully obvious that the church of today is not keeping these Biblical commands. And because we are breaking the commandments of God, Christ is not duty-bound to keep his promise to give whatever we ask (1 John 3.21-23).

Consequently, we have a lot of unanswered prayer. In fact, our whole love for the Lord is called into question if we do not keep his commands, for the Lord Jesus Himself said:

"If you love Me, you will obey what I command."
John 14.15, 21, 23-24

I'm sure we don't realize that as Christians, we are responsible to live a holy and godly life that is different and separate from this world. It may come as a shock to discover that people are actually heading towards a Christless eternity because of the way we are living.

All that we have considered points to the question: Am I **really** seeking after God and his will for **every** area of my life? Or: Am I seeking other things of this world? Have I been obedient to **every command** of the Lord?

Even the Lord Jesus Himself subjected his own will to the will of his Father when He said: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Paul Smith concludes:

"The Christian who would follow the Lord Jesus Christ in any respect must follow Him in this respect. He must lose sight of his own will and seek only to do the will of God. This is essential in the life of a revived Christian, and the blessing of God can never rest upon the life of any man who has not fulfilled this third condition."

In Dr Tozer's chapter "No Revival Without Reformation" he concludes with these words:

"We must return to New Testament Christianity, not in creed only, but in complete manner of life as well. Separation, obedience, humility, simplicity, gravity, self-control, modesty, cross-bearing, these all must again be made a living part of the total Christian concept and be carried out in everyday conduct. We must cleanse the temple of the hucksters and the money-changers and come fully under the authority of our risen Lord once more. And this applies to this writer as well as to everyone that names the name of Jesus. Then we can pray with confidence and expect true revival to follow."

May each one of us prayerfully consider his challenge!

FOUR

*"If my people . . . shall humble themselves ... and pray ...
and TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS ..."*

TURNING FROM WICKED WAYS

Sin in the Church

When the Israelites were defeated at the tiny town of Ai, a major crisis confronted the nation. God had promised to be with them, but suddenly their advance had come to an abrupt halt. What had happened? Wasn't God with them any more? Joshua earnestly sought the Lord:

"O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?" Joshua 7.8

Like Israel of old, the church of today has been defeated at Ai and the reason for our failure is exactly the same as that given to Joshua:

"Stand up.' What are you. doing on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant which I commanded them to keep!"

This wasn't the time for earnest prayer. There was sin in their midst which had to be dealt with. It was the time for confession and repentance.

All through history, the picture is the same. Whenever sin enters, God's blessing is withheld for God cannot work where sin remains in his people. The word given to Joshua was clear:

"I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction." Joshua 7.12

The prophet Micah rebuked the people of his day with similar words:

"Then they will cry out to the Lord, but He will not answer them. At that time, He will hide his face from them, because of the evil they have done."
Micah 3.4

Micah goes on to say that because the prophets had led the people astray, 'there is no answer from God.' (3.7)

In 2 Chronicles 7.14, God states the fact in unmistakable terms that if revival is to be experienced, there must be a turning away from sin.

When we speak of sin, we usually think of those outside the church. Sin in the church is not a situation we readily see or accept. Sin everywhere else, yes, but in the church, how could that be? It is a disturbing fact that sin has entered the church. We can't pretend that it isn't there. God has stated it is, and who are we to question his judgment.

In the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, four were specifically told to repent. The Laodicean Church was called lukewarm and undoubtedly it too had to repent of its way, thus making five out of seven that God called to turn from their sin. The message is clear — there is sin in the church!

When God himself calls his people to turn from their wicked ways, it becomes imperative for us to find out what those wicked ways are. If on the other hand we are unwilling to have our hearts'

searched and fulfil this final condition for revival, then it is really a waste of time to meet the first three conditions. The Psalmist said:

"If I cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened." Psalm 66.18

It is my belief that we need to take a new look at the real meaning of sin. The church has become blinded to its real condition because we don't see sin as God sees it.

We view sin as errors of judgment, weaknesses, a bad disposition or temperament, mistakes maybe, but certainly, not sin! God's Word however, is clear. The Bible calls it 'wicked ways' but we don't realise just how wicked they are. We have lost sight of the seriousness of sin.

When speaking of sin, most people think of those things forbidden in the ten commandments, or the works of the sinful nature mentioned by Paul in Galatians 5. But God's definition of sin is much broader than our narrow concepts.

Let us look at five areas in the New Testament which bring into focus the inroads that sin has made in the church:

Silent sins or sins in the Mind

One of the main areas where sin can enter our life is through the mind. Satan knows that if he can control the mind, he controls the person. He will make every attempt to influence the thought life of every Christian, so as to render them ineffective and defeated.

Satan is called 'the god of this age' who 'has blinded the **minds** of unbelievers, so they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.' (2 Cor 4.4) The person with a mind blinded by Satan is deceived, so that he cannot see the truth as revealed in God's Word. Such a person does not realise the seriousness of his sin, nor does he see his need of Christ as Saviour and Lord. In Romans 8.7, Paul calls the mind of an unbeliever 'the sinful mind' which he says 'is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.'

In opposition to Satan is the Holy Spirit, who also seeks to control the mind. When a person submits the control of their mind to God, a 'renewing of the mind' (Romans 12.2) begins, which results in life and peace. (Romans 8.6)

It is in the mind that a continuous battle is in progress that very few Christians have any idea even exists — the battle for control of the mind. The Apostle Paul expressed his concern to the Corinthian Church about this very thing.

*"But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, **your minds** may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ."* 2 Cor 11.3

Why is this battle for control of the mind of such importance? In his book "Think on these Things" John Maxwell provides the answer:

"What occupies your mind and what you think means more than anything else in your life. Your thought life will determine how much you earn, where you live and what you become in life. Your life today is a result of your thinking yesterday. Your life tomorrow will be determined by what you think today."

It is through the mind that the Holy Spirit reveals the truth of God, but if the mind is occupied with other things or agitated, or passive or dwelling on thoughts contrary to those of God, how can the Spirit of God reveal his truth to the Christian?

Every sin, every sex offence, every crime begins in the mind and it starts as a simple little thought. If you entertain it, it will grow until it finally controls your very life and you become obsessed with it. Eventually, it will drive you to act out your thoughts.

In an article entitled 'The Theatre of your Mind — What Showing?' Denny Gunderson shows the process of how this takes place:

"We think about something — our thoughts plus our attitude produce an emotional response — then we act out what we have thought about."

Maxwell says the same:

"What enters our mind and occupies our thought processes will somewhere, sometime, come out of our mouth."

All too often, we judge a person's spirituality by how they act in church. But anyone can **look** spiritual if they know how to act. The real 'you' can be found when you are lying in bed at night, alone with your thoughts.

What are you thinking about then? What fantasies run through your mind? Do you indulge in sensual daydreams? Are you thinking of how you can get even with someone? Are you criticizing someone in your mind? It's so easy to be an angel on the outside, but a devil in your mind.

"The point is this," says Gunderson, "our thought life is the foundation on which our actions are built. The failure to discipline the mind will ultimately produce bondage to bad habits in both thought and action. The wrong thoughts we entertain over a period of time become easier to dwell on ... someone who continues to have sinful thought patterns soon finds it easier to let his mind 'fall into a rut' than to steer down the right path."

"If a person doesn't heed the conviction of the Holy Spirit and continues to let his mind go, he will reap the consequences of his fleshly habit."

In Matthew 15.19 Jesus speaks of at least four areas where our mind can become the source of sin:

"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."

Jesus said that all these things come from the heart. (In both Hebrew and Greek, the words used for 'heart' are connected with the functions of the mind.) Let us look closely at these four areas:

1 Evil Thoughts

Have we ever given the impression of being considerate and loving towards others when all the time, there are thoughts of resentment and criticism in our mind? Young people don't agree with the restrictions placed on them by their parents, so thoughts of resentment creep into their minds. Others may have had harsh words said about them, or even some action made against them.

They responded in two ways. On the outside, they appeared calm and forgiving. But inside, they are burning with resentment and unloving thoughts. Maybe revenge or thoughts of jealousy. Do such thoughts come from the Holy Spirit?

2 Evil Sex thoughts

All sex habits and immorality begin in the mind. But how do they get into the mind? By looking and

listening. Many Christians have decided that there is nothing wrong with watching scenes of lust, sexual perversion and nudity on TV or video. They don't realise that what enters your mind will sooner or later become a desire which seeks gratification. This in turn leads to action. One writer expressed the process by saying:

*"Sow a thought and you reap an act;
Sow an act and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit and you reap a character;
Sow a character and you reap a destiny."*

It is a fact of life that sexual desires are stimulated by what we see. With the flood of sexual immorality displayed in pornography and on TV, it must be remembered that **we** control what our minds feed on, **we** control what we read, **we** control what we watch on TV and unless **we** discipline ourselves, we will only fill our minds with scenes of lust, sex and corruption that Satan will continually bring before our imagination.

The TV and Video especially can become the very tool Satan has been looking for to inject his corruption into our minds. No longer do we have to go to the movies or the drive-in; now we can have our very own night-club, right within the privacy of our home and watch nudity, sex and violence and who would ever know?

You don't need to have physical contact to sin. It can all happen silently, in the mind, without anybody knowing, just you and God. All you have to do is look, to long for and to lust. There is only one reason why people gaze with lust in their eyes and that is because they have it in their minds. The Bible calls this SIN. The Lord Jesus said (Mat 5.27-28):

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery,' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

"In the eyes of the Lord," says Gunderson, "entertaining just the thought of adultery is in itself a form of adultery. Letting your mind go the wrong way will lead your life the wrong way."

All sexual immorality begins in the mind and all lust of the mind begins by looking.

The same goes for music. Young people who plug into their stereo for hours listening to rock music are only fooling and enslaving themselves when they say it doesn't affect their Christian life. 'Oh I don't listen to the words,' they say, 'only the music.' That is the devil's lie!

Our mind is like a tape-recorder and everything we hear is recorded in our memory. What goes into our mind **does affect us**, even though we may not realise it at the time. Garbage in, garbage out. Truth in, truth out!

I once heard a music professor make the bold claim that if you told him the type of music you listened to, he could tell the type of person you were. In the audience sat a young fellow who had a Bachelor of Music degree, who openly challenged the professor to prove his claim. The professor willingly agreed. After the meeting, the young man provided the professor with his tastes in music, which in his case was mainly rock. The professor then proceeded to give a very accurate description of what this young man was really like, with his wife sitting there, nodding in agreement. The whole point of the exercise by the professor was that music moulds character, it governs how we think, how we feel and how we act. It is a powerful medium of communication. It is an expression of man's view on life. It tells of the thoughts and emotions of people. It is also a reflection of the culture and society in which we live. Napoleon once said:

"Let me control the music of a country and eventually, I'll control that country."

Music affects us in three areas of our life: the physical, mental and spiritual; and because of the powerful influence it has over people, any Christian who allows their mind to be filled with evil thoughts through music is making provision for Satan to control their mind and body. Any young person who says they need or want rock music is automatically saying 'my relationship to Christ is not what it should be.'

How can any Christian justify listening to music that is full of illicit sex, drugs and rebellion against authority and where the lives of the performers are clearly anti-christian and even satanic. Is this the sort of thing that God's people should feed into their minds? Is this honouring to God? Will it bring praise to his Name? Would Jesus listen to it?

If we saturate our thoughts with a music that presents almost every type of sin in the book, how can that help us grow in our Christian life? How can God use a person whose mind is influenced and even controlled by a music that is from the devil himself? It bears repeating, be careful what you feed into your mind, because that will determine what you become.

3 Thoughts of Theft and Dishonesty

Our society is becoming increasingly dishonest. We may never have robbed a bank or stolen a car, but what do you call it when you steal answers at school or when you hide things from your parents or when you don't declare everything on your income tax return?

And how did these actions start? Were they made on the spur of the moment? As we have seen, all actions begin in the mind.

4 Slander

To slander someone means you make a false or malicious statement about them. It also means you are holding wrong thoughts about that person in your mind.

All these temptations to the mind are areas where a Christian can sin, and possibly no-one would ever know, except God. Our thoughts may be silent to others, but God can read our minds.

"For the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts." 1 Chronicles 28.9

"The Lord knows the thoughts of man." Psalm 94.11

Maybe no-one in the world will ever know what we are really thinking, but God sees and knows every thought and when our thoughts run contrary to his word and his holiness, He calls it **sin**.

I believe that a vast majority of Christians have never discovered their need for a renewed mind and have never asked themselves why their minds are subject to uncontrollable thoughts, objectionable pictures and imaginations.

The fact is they have no control over their minds. Let each of us ask ourselves the question: Who controls MY MIND? For if I can't control it and God doesn't control it, then WHO controls it?

Do you want God to give you a new mind and to change your thinking habits? Before God can fully use us, we **must** have our minds renewed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12.2). Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, to be made new **in the attitude of your minds**; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."* Ephesians 4.22-24

In overcoming the enemy, Gunderson presents three important steps to follow:

"Because Satan isn't a creator, but rather an exploiter, he can only use something which already exists and twist its proper use.

Unresolved sin allows the enemy a foothold on which to focus his attacks. Our response to this temptation should be threefold:

(i) Submit to God (James 4.7a) by responding to his conviction of sin;

(ii) Resist the devil (Jas 4.7b) by taking authority over him;

(Hi) Flee temptation and pursue righteousness (1 Tim 6.11 and 2 Tim 2.22.)

The point to remember is: You can't flee from what you still hold in your mind, or fight against the thought. Instead you need to replace the thought-pictures with thoughts that will edify and lift your soul toward God."

In first Peter 1.13 we read:

"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled."

The main way to discipline our minds is to focus our attention on wholesome things, on God and his will for our lives. In his Word, God has given us his guidelines:

*"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praise-worthy, **think on these things.**"* Philippians 4.8

Gunderson adds this advice:

"The discipline of Bible meditation and scripture memorization provides important tools which not only bring cleansing, but also help us remain whole-hearted in Christian practice."

Paul wrote to the Philippians: *"Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ."* In the original Greek, this literally reads: 'We are to think in the same way as the Lord Himself.' If we call ourselves Christians, then we should long to be like Jesus in every possible way, and that includes our thought life.

The bottom line is this:

"There's a battle for our minds and we cannot be passive spectators assuming that God will take care of it all while we do nothing. God is already doing his part to convict, expose and bring healing. He has committed Himself to bring us victory if we will follow his instructions. It is now time for us to wage aggressive action.

"Second Corinthians 10.5 declares that we are to take every thought captive. God's Word gives us no excuse for not developing a renewed mind. Spiritual

weapons have been made available to us for the battle, but those weapons are powerless unless they are used.

"Victory can be accomplished if we will simply give ourselves to God's Word and his Spirit. God is more than able to overcome the enemy's tactics against us. Will you now respond to God's provision by picking up your weapons and resolving to do battle until the victory is won for Jesus' sake?"

Sexual Sin

"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, for these are improper for God's Holy people. For this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person — such a man is an idolater — has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God." Eph 5.3,5

"Put to death therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature; sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these the wrath of God is coming." Col 3.5-6

"It is God's will that you should be holy, that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God." 1 Thess 4.3-5

In his letters, Paul repeatedly warned the early Christians about the dangers of sexual sin. These warnings were not given just to fill in space. They reveal Paul's concern and instruction in an area of our lives where even God's people can sin. Read carefully what he says. The greedy and immoral person wants things more than he wants God!

Any person who persists in sexual sin, Paul says, is worshipping and glorifying his body and therefore has put his sensual desires in the place of God. This, God says, is idolatry, that is, worshipping something other than the Creator. In so doing, they exclude themselves from the kingdom of God (Eph 5.5).

We tend to think that this whole area of sexual sin is only committed by people outside the church. But to our horror, we discover that even this sin has crept in among the people of God. I have watched young people who have committed their lives to Christ and who could have been greatly used by God, ruin their whole future because of an unguarded moment when their sexual desires took over. Often, an unwanted child or a hastily arranged marriage was the result.

Even church leaders and pastors have found themselves drawn into a relationship by an attraction to someone other than their marriage partner. It is so easy to happen.

King David, referred to as 'the man after God's own heart,' committed this very sin with Bathsheba. It is an area where the devil can run amok in the church because he plays on our sexual desires. James says:

"Each one is tempted when by his own desires he is dragged away and enticed; then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin." (Jam 1.14-15)

There are many, who, like Bathsheba, attend church every Sunday. They are not like Delilah, the painted prostitute who spun her clever web for Samson and was known all over town for her sinful lifestyle.

No, Bathsheba was not a prostitute; she was a faithful, clean-living wife, and yet she and David fell into sin. She had not seduced him, but it happened, quietly, without anyone knowing. And all sexual sin in the church happens this way.

Human nature hasn't changed. This sin is repeated many times over and the alarming thing is that it is carried on by Christian people who seem blind to what they are doing. I know of several instances where men and women in places of leadership in the church were drawn into a relationship outside their marriage. It happened gradually, almost as if God was leading them. The alarming thing is that both were working together for the Lord!

Listen to this letter from one minister who had his life ruined from such a sin.

"It all started innocently — at least, it seemed so. My ministry kept throwing a certain girl and me together ... one of the most active lay persons in the church — and we both carried the identical burden for the church people. It all began in common ministry — that's what's so ironic. We worked together, shared together, prayed together, laughed together — not just her and me, but in a group. Yet there was an attraction there, a spark between us that lit a fire!

My wife was busy with the kids and her job. She never suspected anything — and I was continually around this lay woman. It happened just like you warn — we started 'climbing the ladder,' exchanging little pleasantries meaningful glances, double-meaning kidding, and finally little touches, pats, a squeeze of the hand, a quick hug, all accompanied by very spiritual overtones. It was exhilarating! I'm not saying I wasn't guilty — just that sin had such a powerful attraction to me. I wanted more and I was willing to risk anything, everything, to get it!

Well, to make a long story short, so did she. It seemed like I was helplessly being swept along by a river of desire. It was like I was a teenager again — going too far, then repenting and promising to do better; then just as quick I was hungrily seeking more sin. Soon I quit resisting and was swept into outright adultery. All this time, I kept up my 'ministry — I don't think anyone really knew it — that's scary, isn't it?

Then it all came crashing down. 'Be sure your sin will find you out' is true.' We got 'found out.' Now my life is a shambles. My dreams have shattered at my feet. I've lost my beautiful wife — I loved her all the time and still do. I've lost my wonderful children — oh, how I ache to be with them again. I've lost my ministry — probably forever — what an ache it is to sit in a service without running it. It's all gone — my future, my hopes, my dreams, my family, my reputation, my ministry. The devil doesn't show you where the little temptations lead you. The excitement, the delights, the powerful seductiveness of sin are fleeting.

If my story can help others, use it without my name. Tell your young men to 'stay off the ladder' and 'drink from their own spring.' Tell them to clean up their thought life. Tell them sin doesn't pay, and sooner or later it will 'find them out.' Maybe the ashes of my dreams can teach others to say no to the devil.

With little hope anymore ...

What does God say to such behaviour? What is his attitude to those who indulge in sexual sin? As God has not changed, his attitude to this sin remains the same as that expressed to King David: "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord." After a visit from Nathan the prophet, David realised the full extent of his action: "I have sinned against the Lord," he lamented.

Even though God's attitude to sin has not changed, we can't say the same for the church. Because sexual sin has become so prevalent in our society, the church has become used to it, so much so that even pastors and prominent church leaders are now having 'affairs'.

How can revival ever come if the church is caught up in the very same sins as the world? In fact, the whole credibility of the church is called into question when such sin is carried on with hardly a protest from anyone. It needs to be said, though I hesitate in saying it, but how can anyone continue to minister the Word of God to others when they themselves are living in sin? What they preach and teach can never come from a heart that is burning with the Word of God. Any word they speak must inevitably come from their own minds. It could never be classed as 'a word from the Lord.' God's blessing is no longer on their ministry, their credibility is gone and the respect they once held gradually evaporates.

I might add that most of the church leaders I have seen who have been caught up in sexual sin have ruined their lives, their marriage, family and often their church. Sin has a habit of affecting many people. It did in King David's family and it continues to do the same today. It's like throwing a stone into a pool of calm water -- the ripples go out in all directions. So too do the ripples of sin.

I think the most disturbing effect of such a sin is the devastation it causes in a church. People lose faith in the leadership and become disillusioned, critical, bitter and terribly hurt. These may be strong words, but I am not talking about hypothetical cases. I am talking about real life situations that have occurred which resulted in ruined lives and brought shame and disgrace to churches, families and pastors. It is tragic and you will find that gossip will run like wild-fire when such things come out into the open. It's like giving bullets to the devil to fire at the church. He loves it and will use any scandal to destroy a church or a man's ministry.

To anyone engaged in sexual sin or involved in a questionable relationship and who believes they won't get caught or found out, hear this warning from Keith Drury (General Secretary for Youth in The Wesleyan Church.)

I want to unmask the ultimate lie that Satan is telling you: "You'll never get caught."

*Satan is telling you that you are the exception —you can get away with it. He says a little bit of sin for a season won't hurt you, and no one will ever find out. Listen to me carefully. Satan is a liar. You **will** be caught!*

Sinners have believed they could get away with sin from the beginning of time. Adam and Eve believed it. They got caught. Cain thought he'd gotten away with murder. Cain got caught. Rebekah and Jacob thought they had deceived everyone. They got caught. Joseph's brothers thought their sales agreement with the Ishmaelites cleared them of ever being found out. They got caught. Moses thought he had buried his sin in the sand. Moses got caught.

Achan thought the evidence was well hidden under the floor of his tent. Achan got caught. Saul thought Samuel would never find out about a few animals kept back. Saul got caught. David figured a little sin on the rooftop or in the privacy of his bedroom would never come to light. David got caught. Ananias and Sapphira thought they'd devised the perfect plot. Ananias and Sapphira got caught. It is simple: sinners get caught.

Do you think you can get away with a little sin? Who do you think you are? You will be like every other sinner down through all of history. You'll be caught. It is a universal law of life: 'Be sure your sin will find you out.' Do you think you can break God's universal laws of life? Do you think you will be the first who gets away with sin?

How will you be found out? Maybe the woman will tell. She may break under her burden of sin and blurt out the whole story in confession at some altar or to a friend or minister.

Or maybe someone else may tell. You think no one saw you, but someone somewhere did. And they will tell. Or believers will just know it. Christians have a special sixth sense about sin in the camp, and they will sense something is wrong.

Or maybe even you will tell on yourself. The burden of guilt may eventually be so much for you to handle that you yourself will give up and confess to this sin just to find release spiritually. Or if you seem to be getting away with it for a season, you will be more and more bold so that you will eventually cause yourself to get caught.

Or finally, God will tell on you. Even if you don't get found out by any of these, God himself will bring sin into the light. Do you think you can hide from Him? Don't you think He will continue to do what He has always done — expose sin?

*Do you think you will be the first human in history to get away with sin? He will find a godly Nathan-like prophet and reveal directly to him what you have done. It may take weeks, months, or even years to crop up, but sooner or later your sin will be found out. You can't hide sin and get away with it. This is the devil's lie. If you are fooling around with sexual indiscretion, you **will** get caught.*

I address this matter last because it is Satan's ultimate lie. Is there not enough evidence about us to illustrate that people do not get away with sin? If you are perched on the edge of sexual indiscretion, turn back now. Flee — leave your coat behind. Recognize the consequences. Eventually you'll be caught. And you, your family, your church and all your friends will pay a heavy price.

The devil promises you all the kingdoms of this world if you will simply bow down and worship at his altar of carnal desires. But you can't have it all. God says your sin will find you out and you'll pay the price. And God is truth.

There is only one remedy for deliverance from sexual sin and that is by total death at the cross. Remember what Paul said to the Colossians: "Put to death ... sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed." The words 'put to death' emphasize the importance of dealing with such things, for if these desires haven't died, they are still alive! Any attempt to suppress them, or walk away from them or cover them over will only end in defeat. The old sensual desires will continue to return unless they have been dealt a death blow in a complete repentance and confession to God. We have the promise that God will forgive and cleanse us from all sin (1 John 1.9) but we must take the first step.

The Misuse of our Tongue — James 3.3-12

From my observation, one of the main areas of sin in the church concerns the misuse of the tongue. In the Epistle of James, the Lord talks about the need to control our tongue. A tongue out of control He says, is like a ship without a rudder and as a small spark can set a whole forest on fire, so the tongue can do untold damage to other people:

"No man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison." James 3.8

It shouldn't have to be said, but I have seen so-called 'spirit-filled Christians' cut other people to pieces and cause enormous hurt and ill-feeling by just a few choice words from their unbridled tongue. One would think that the church would be the last place to find a tongue out of control, but frequently, this is not the case. In many church members' meetings for instance, the teaching of James has been thrown to the wind. Criticism, gossip and slander all seem to have become commonplace in modern church life. We must stop and ask ourselves: Whatever has happened to us? God's own people, who are supposed to have the life of Christ within, who are supposed to possess the fruit of the Spirit, who

are supposed to be filled with God's love, are doing exactly what the Lord says not to do. We praise God with one breath, and criticise our brother in the next. 'Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.' (James 3.10)

Paul likewise reminds us not to grieve the Holy Spirit and one sure way of doing just that is by an outburst from our tongue. We may excuse such an outburst as a flaw in our temperament. But such reasoning overlooks the fact that the Bible specifically says:

*"My brothers, this **should not be!**" ... "Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water." James 3.10-12*

The four comparisons given here are meant to show that according to the ordinary operations of nature, these things are impossible. How then can a person who claims to be filled with the Spirit, have a tongue that is full of criticism and slander? A person under the control of the Holy Spirit will also have a tongue under the control of the Spirit of God. Where dwells the love of God in a person whose tongue continually criticises and gossips about others?

Maybe some of us need to get alone with God and seek his cleansing and forgiveness. In addition to this, it is important to remember that this sin, possibly more than most, affects other people. It could be that you will have to go to someone that has been hurt as a result of your words and ask their forgiveness. It's not easy, but you will never know the peace of God until you have done it.

Something we have said in the past, may be the very thing that is blocking the blessing of God. That one sin of Achan was enough for God to withdraw his presence and stop a whole nation from victory.

Dr F.B. Meyer told of a meeting that was dragging along without any signs of success until an elder arose and said:

Pastor, I don't believe there is going to be a revival as long as Brother Jones and I don't speak to each other." He then went over to his brother in Christ and said: Brother Jones, we have not spoken for five years; let's bury the hatchet. Here's my hand!

The audience was deeply moved — to tears! Soon, another elder arose and said: 'Pastor, I've been saying mean things about you behind your back and nice things to your face. I want you to forgive me!' Many others stood and confessed their wrongs. God began to move in their midst and a revival soon came to that community. "Lord, do it again!"

May our daily prayer be:

*"Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord;
keep watch over the door of my lips."
Psalm 141.3*

Doubtful Actions are Sinful

*"But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith: and **everything that does not come from faith is sin.**"
Romans 14.23*

This is simply saying that whatever we do, if we are not fully convinced in our minds it is right, and that we have the clear guidance and approval of God, then it is sinful. Putting it another way, doubtful actions are sinful. If we are not fully trusting in God for directions, our eyes must be on other things.

Such a definition puts a whole new light on what sin is. How many of us in all honesty, have made decisions, have taken a course of study or a new job and have even married, without clear confirmation from the Lord. Such actions are done without faith. God was left out. We just went ahead on our own.

Sadly, our churches are full of such people. Some, called to the mission field, went into marriage without the Lord's approval. The result — they ended up with a partner of their choice, but never reached missionary service.

I have known others who took a job without the Lord's clear guidance. It ended their Christian life. At the time, their reasons seemed good. Everything appeared to fall into place, except that God did not have his say! His voice was drowned out by their will and determination that they knew what was best. When things don't go as planned, we call it an error of judgment. God calls it **sin**.

This verse needs to be applied to other areas of our life; the music we listen to, the places we visit, the things we buy, all should come under scrutiny as to whether or not we act in faith. And the more we think about it, the more we begin to see how little we consult our God about the daily concerns of life. I believe that many of our daily activities are carried on without even a thought of what the Lord would have us do. In effect, we are saying with our actions, if not our lips, we do not need Him!

You may be thinking, how can anyone possibly say that doubtful actions are sinful? Here are some reasons:

1 If God has enlightened your mind sufficiently to doubt whether a thing is right or wrong, you must stop and examine the situation, for He is speaking to you through your conscience.

2 When anyone does something when they have doubts, it shows they are selfish and have other intentions besides doing the will of God. It shows they want to satisfy their own desires. They doubt whether God will approve, but they go ahead and do it anyway. Isn't there selfishness in this? Finney points out the real motive behind their action with these comments:

"If he honestly wished to serve God, when he doubted he would stop and enquire and examine until he was satisfied. But to go forward while he is in doubt, shows that he is selfish and wicked and is willing to do it whether God is pleased or not, and that he wants to do it, whether it is right or wrong. He does it because he wants to do it and not because it is right."

3 It also indicates a laziness, for they would rather act in a wrong way than attempt to find out and know the correct way.

4 It shows a reckless attitude, a putting aside of the authority of God and a desire not to do God's will, not even caring whether He is pleased or not.

God has made his attitude very clear: "Whatever is not of faith is sin!" Anything we do, without fully trusting in God, shows we are relying on our own ability to see us through. What we are really saying is this: "I can manage on my own, Lord! I'll call You when I need help!"

We can't simply say "Oh Lord, if I have sinned in this, please forgive me!" If you have done anything of which you have doubts, **you have sinned**, whether the thing itself is right or wrong.

I ask this final question — will you cease everything that you have doubts about? It may be asking a lot, but if you continue to do things and go to places that are doubtful, God cannot bless, for your action shows self is still the controlling factor in your life and all selfishness is sin.

The Sin of Omission

"Anyone then who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." James 4.17

What a vast array of things can come under the spotlight from this verse! It is not enough to say we haven't done any evil. If we failed to do any good that we could, we have sinned.

Ezekiel speaks of having the blood of others upon our heads by failing to warn them (Ezekiel 33). We know that all people outside of Christ are heading for hell, but many of us have made almost no effort at all to bring them to Christ. The same can be said about prayer. Here also, we know that prayer is important and without it, nothing happens, but are we praying? Instead, we sit goggle-eyed in front of the TV, for hours, while friends, relatives and workmates get closer and closer to eternity. We need to be reminded that Samuel called prayerlessness a sin.

"As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you." 1 Samuel 12.23

We know the way, but our lips are sealed. We know the truth, but keep it to ourselves. We know the good we ought to do, the prayer that should be made and the people we should speak to, but for some reason, we fail to do it.

Nor is this all. We are told to make the most of every opportunity, (Eph 5.16 Col 4.5), but waste away hours in parties and amusements as if we had all the time in the world.

What can we say to all this? Does God overlook such failings? Does He excuse us? Or, are these omissions regarded as sinful? We can argue all day long about our shortcomings. We can give them all sorts of fancy names, but as far as God is concerned, they are still sin.

We in the church need to look again at the way God feels about sin. We are dealing with a Holy God who does not tolerate sin. Habakkuk said:

"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, You cannot tolerate wrong." Hab 1.13

Isaiah rebuked the people of his day with these words:

"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that He will not hear." Isa 59.1-2

All sin, no matter who commits it, is detestable in God's sight. John reminds us in his first letter that 'He who does what is sinful is of the devil.' (1 John 3.8)

If that's the case, then sin in the Christian must mean we are out of step with God and have yielded to the subtle temptations of the evil one. Sin in the followers of the Lord must be even more abhorrent to God than sin in the world. One of the main reasons why John wrote his first letter was 'so that **you will not sin.**' (1 John 2.1)

Sin in any shape or form should never be the practice of the people of God. But so often it is - may God forgive us!

Here we are, the Christian church, God's own special people, the ones called by his Name, who claim to know the way and to have the Life of God within us, living in 'wicked' ways.

Is it any wonder the world does not take us seriously? Is it any wonder we have lost that power that once was a feature of God's people? This is why the word of the Lord is so plain:

"Turn from your wicked ways."

Examples from History

In every revival in history, this 'turning from sin' has been a predominant feature among the people of God. In the Old Testament, we can look, for example, at the revival under Samuel (1 Sam 7), the revival at Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah (Jon 3), the revival under Asa (2 Chron 15) and the revival under Ezra and Nehemiah (Neh 8-9). In each case, three characteristics stand out:

- 1 Conviction of sin was real and deep.
- 2 Sin was openly confessed.
- 3 Repentance was experienced as they turned from the sin they had committed.

We see the same features on the day of Pentecost. And down through the centuries, wherever a genuine revival occurred, you would find the people of God turning from their sin in confession and repentance.

Hear the call of one revival preacher from the last century. In his book "Lectures on Revivals of Religion," Charles Finney concludes one of his addresses with these challenging words:

"As you go over the catalogue of your sins, be sure to resolve upon immediate and entire reformation. Wherever you find anything wrong, commit yourself at once in the strength of God, to sin no more in that way.

"It will be of no benefit to examine yourself, unless you determine to change, in every respect, that which you find wrong in heart, temper or conduct.

"Go thoroughly to work in all this! Go now! Do not put it off: that will only make matters worse. Confess to God those sins that have been committed against God, and to man, those sins that have been committed against man.

"Do not think about getting off easy by going around the stumbling blocks. Take them out of the way. In breaking up your fallow ground, you must remove every obstacle.

"Things may be left that you may think are little things and you may wonder why you don't have peace with God, when the reason is your proud and carnal mind has covered up something which God requires you to confess and remove.

"Unless you take up your sins in this way and consider them in detail, one by one, you can form no idea of the amount or weight of them. You should go over the list as thoroughly and as carefully and as solemnly as if you were preparing yourself for the judgment!"

In the Welsh revival of 1904, Evan Roberts continually set before the people what became known as 'the four points'.

He would ask, did the people desire an outpouring of the Spirit of God? Then four conditions must be observed and these were essential:

(i) "Is there any sin in your past that you have not confessed to God? On your knees at once! Your past must be put away and your self cleansed.

(ii) "Is there anything in your life that is doubtful — anything that you cannot decide whether it is good or evil? Away with it! There must not be a cloud between you and God. Have you forgiven everybody, everybody, EVERYBODY? If not, don't expect forgiveness for your own sins. You won't get it!

(iii) "Do what the Spirit prompts you to do. Obedience — prompt, implicit, unquestioning obedience to the Spirit.

(iv) "A public confession of Christ as your Saviour. There is a vast difference between profession and confession."

Many more examples could be given, but enough has been said to show that everything known to be wrong must go if God is to send revival. To 'turn from your wicked ways' simply means to cease from doing it! It means there is a heart-cry of confession of sin and a repentance where the sin is forsaken.

We talk about revival; we want it, we desperately need it, but we don't realise that God will not answer our request for revival where sin remains. If we really want revival, then each of us must search our hearts for any trace of sin. We must ask ourselves:

*"Lord, is there sin in **my** life? Is it in **ME**? Am I another Achan, holding up the blessing of God because of my sin? Is there something of selfishness or pride that lingers on? Is there a continuing desire for the things of this world? Have I sinned in my mind or with my tongue? And what of my prayer life? Have I been neglecting this vital ministry? Have I been obedient to every prompting by the Spirit of God?"*

Anyone can convey the impression of being concerned about revival, but how many of us are prepared for God to have His great searchlight expose the hidden sin in our lives? Would you? Can you say with David:

*"Search me, O God and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in **me**, and lead me in the way everlasting."*
Psalm 139.23-24

*"Do you wish for a revival?" asks Charles Finney in his revival lectures. "If God should ask you this moment, by an audible voice from heaven: 'Do you want a revival?' would you dare to say 'yes'? '**Are you willing to make the sacrifices?**' Would you answer 'yes'? 'When shall it begin?' Would you answer 'Let it begin tonight — let it begin here — let it begin in my heart NOW?'"*

Would you dare to say so to God if you should hear His voice today?

C O N C L U S I O N

Our country faces corruption and wickedness on a scale we have never seen before. Our jails are full, our homes are falling apart, our marriages are failing and our efforts to halt the downward trend seem all in vain. Ultimately, the cause comes back to a nation that has rejected God.

And a large part of the blame must be levelled at the church, the 'people who are called by God's name.' They are the ones who know the way. They are the ones who are followers of God and whose lives are governed by his Word. But that Word no longer has first place in their lives. Sin has entered in. Prayer has been neglected. Things of this world have drawn them away from their God. And the dilemma that faced Samson of old is exactly the same that the church faces today.

*"His strength had left him ...
He did not know that the Lord
had left him." Judges 16.19-20*

In Matthew 5.13-16 Jesus taught that the influence the church was to have on society could be likened to the effects of salt and light. **Salt** symbolised the purifying, healing and preserving qualities. **Light** is meant to be seen and to show the way in darkness. It can be a guide or a warning of danger and obstacles that we encounter. Light also refers to the way we are to illumine the minds of men and women by the gospel. Such features were to be the characteristics of the church of Jesus Christ.

But the Lord also taught that salt can lose its saltiness, and light can go out. This was to represent a church that loses its influence on society. It no longer brings light to a world in darkness. It has lost the ability to act as a purifying or cleansing agent. And the question that must inevitably arise from such teaching can be simply stated:

*Is this what has happened to the
evangelical church in this country?*

I think there would be little doubt in people's minds that the influence of the church in Australia is rapidly declining. It no longer speaks with a voice that acts as the conscience of the nation. It has lost the power that once characterised the people of God. Doesn't this tell us something? Doesn't this tell us that the church of which we are a part needs reviving?

It tells me that God's people have lost God's power. It tells me that the standards and attitudes of this world are now part of the church. It tells me that preachers are not speaking out against sin and corruption as they should. It tells me that prayer has virtually ceased. It tells me that WE are not obeying the Word of God. And like the effect of Achan's sin on Israel, we find ourselves in a battle without the presence and power of God. What a disaster!

But we seem oblivious of all this. It appears we don't really care. Doesn't the situation disturb you? Doesn't it cause you great concern? Doesn't it drive you to prayer?

The only hope for our nation is to turn back to God in repentance and faith and seek his forgiveness, but it will never happen until there is a spiritual earthquake in the church. Australia has never seen a great sweeping revival that other countries have experienced. We have never witnessed the impact that revival can have on a nation.

But history tells me that when the church returns to a right relationship with God, the transformation can affect the whole country. Violence and crime are reduced dramatically. Jail cells empty out. Magistrates find themselves with little or nothing to do. Hotels and brothels close down. Sexual immorality is reduced. The divorce rate is cut back significantly, debts are paid and the quality and output of work increases beyond what any union or employer could imagine.

In brief, a revival affects the whole nation. And these are not airy-fairy words! They are **facts of history** for any who bother to research them. Pick any revival you like and you will find the same effects on society, and the bigger the revival, the greater the impact on the country.

*But sadly, it seems, this truth
has not gripped our hearts.*

We have the enormous power of God at our disposal, but leave it locked up in heaven. We have the very answer that will eliminate the greed, corruption and violence in people, but our voice is scarcely heard. And yet the history of revivals stands as the greatest rebuke to the church of today, for God has revived his people many times in years gone by. There can be no doubt that these very same promises **HAVE BEEN** fulfilled on many occasions when God's people met the conditions in humility and repentance.

It all began (and this is the key) when the people of God put their own lives in order first. Once that had happened, the effects flowed on to the rest of the population.

In second Chronicles 7.14, God has give us a threefold promise:

- 1 *That He will hear our prayer*
- 2 *That He will forgive our sin*
- 3 *That He will heal our land*

These promises are the very words of God Himself and no promise of God has ever failed. He has always kept his Word. But do we believe them? Do we really believe that God can do for our nation what has never been done before? We say we do, but I fear many of us have silent doubts. We question in our hearts how God could transform a nation that is so godless and corrupt. Gradually, the greatness and power of God has faded from our vision as we look at the frightening situation we are in. Other things have become the focus of our attention instead of the promise of God to 'heal the land'. But look again at these promises:

I will hear from heaven ...

I will forgive their sin ...

I will heal their land ...

There is no uncertainty here. They are clear statements of what God **WILL** do, not what He can do or try to do or hope He can do. Let us then take hold of these promises. Let us believe them with all our heart. Let us wait on God daily in prayer until we see Him move in convicting power among his people.

We have looked at the four conditions upon which God has promised to act. Paul Smith says:

*"The four can be summed up in one sentence containing four words: **Get right with God.**"*

"The Christian who is right with God is the Christian who is revived. The Christian who would get revived is the Christian who is willing to get right with God."

When we fulfil the conditions, then, and not before, will God meet **His** promise. If there is any sin, God will not hear. The promises are there, waiting to be fulfilled, **IF** we will meet God's requirements.

The final question we need to ask ourselves is simply this:

Am I willing to pay the price? Revival is costly. It requires a **total** commitment. It could mean that major changes will have to be made to your life. But it is the **ONLY** way.

The evangelist Gipsy Smith was once asked how to start a revival. He answered:

"Go home, lock yourself in your room, kneel down in the middle of your floor. Draw a chalk-mark all around yourself and ask God to start a revival inside that chalk-mark. When He has answered your prayer, revival will be on!"

*That is where a revival begins, **in MY heart!***

Will you let God begin it **NOW**? Will you let God have control over every area of your life? Will you be willing to die to all selfish desires and things of this world?

*May God forgive us for our sin and half-hearted commitment, and may He change us to be **HIS** instruments through which that dynamic power may once again become a reality in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

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Biographical Sketch

The writer of this timely book is an ordained minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, in Queensland. He graduated from Kingsley College in 1976 and has pastored churches in Fortitude Valley and Everton Hills, both in Brisbane. At the beginning of 1986, he and his family moved to Queensland's Gold Coast to pastor the new pioneer Wesleyan Methodist Church in Southport.

OTHER FREE BOOKS

Roy Hession

The Calvary Road, by Roy Hession, very simply outlines personal revival (sanctification) through being filled with the Holy Spirit. The 'how to' of Christian Surrender is revealed for all who would seek the Lord with all their heart. This is not another self help book but a most humbling revelation of the sin we fail (or refuse) to see and which keeps us from an intimate walk with Jesus.

Download from <http://www.christianissues.biz/revival.html>

We Would See Jesus, also by Roy Hession, is a wonderful follow-up to *The Calvary Road*. For this book and **Be Filled Now!**,

Download from <http://www.christianissues.biz/revival.html>

Tongues

Today's Tongues, by Bryce Hartin, is a small booklet which gives a counsellor's eye-opening insight into today's tongues phenomena. It takes very little time to read yet gives a clear and convincing Biblical argument. Please take the time to study this material, with an open mind and in the light of Scripture.

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All About Speaking In Tongues, by Fernand Legrand, reveals how Pentecostals 'created' Charismatic Catholics. This book is well written, by someone in the know, and deals with much Scripture.

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Bryce Hartin

The Christian, His Enemies And His Armour, was written by Bryce Hartin as an aid to the spiritual warfare in which all Christians are engaged. The writer feels that perhaps the greatest assistance he can offer is to give some Biblical instruction on **the Christian's enemies** - what they can and cannot

do - and on **the Christian's armour** and how to use it.

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Riding The Waves is a booklet, by the same author, in which the background of today's religious trends and the formation of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement is discussed.

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The Last Days, exposes the great deception of these last days. The church is in trouble - deep trouble and many within its ranks are confused and frightened.

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Perseverance Of The Saints

Perseverance Of The Saints is a clear Biblical argument against the Once Saved Always Saved doctrine, otherwise called Unconditional Security.

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