



Chapter 5

REVIVAL FIRE

*“Is not My Word like fire,”
declares the Lord....
(Jeremiah 23:29)*

You and I have lived through a marvelous day of undisturbed security and unlimited freedoms. Today, we teeter on the edge of the unknown as never before.

We are seeing men of unscrupulous evil assuming positions of authority and influence.

For the first time in all of history, man has the ability to totally destroy life as we know it.

We see genetic engineering developing with grotesque and unspeakable evil experimentation and potential.

We see sexual perversion promoted as a *perfectly acceptable* “alternative life style”.

And *more than 4,000* precious, helpless, little, unborn babies are being ruthlessly slaughtered every day in these United States with no one to hear their

The Sword

silent screams. (38,000,000 since the Roe vs. Wade decision in 1973, through 1998.*)

If our Lord tarries, it would seem that we are about to see the Christian church thrust into an arena that will surely be more satanic, more aggressive, more vicious than has ever been experienced by any other generation.

But it is as the world grows darker and more evil that we, God's light on this planet, have the potential to shine ever more brightly. A light that may go unnoticed during the day becomes a virtual beacon in the black hours of the night.

The Spirit and The Sword

In Matthew 25:1-13 our Lord referred to wise virgins who made sure their lamps were filled with oil so their flames burned brightly in the darkness and to foolish virgins who let their lamps run dry, so their presence merely contributed to the darkness around them. As the night darkens around us in these last days, are we, like the wise virgins, ready with our lamps filled with oil and burning brightly, or is our flame merely a flicker in the wind?

It is evident from this illustration that fire was dependent on a supply of oil. Where there was no oil, there was no fire. In Scripture, oil is a picture of the Holy Spirit. When He descended at Pentecost, we're told:

...what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit.... (Acts 2:3-4, NLT)

The room must have been lit with a holy glow, like a room full of living lamps as they sat there with *what looked like flames or tongues of fire* resting on each one, not unlike the wise virgins with their lamps in hand.

It's interesting that in this passage the Lord is careful to emphasize the *individuality* of the believer. Even though they were *all together in one place* (Acts 2:1) and were *with one accord in prayer...* (Acts 1:14, KJV), the Holy Spirit did not just deal with them in a collective manner. Notice*what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them* (NLT). The New International Version says *what seemed like tongues of fire... separated and came to rest on each of them*. It wasn't just one big flame that descended on the assembly as a whole. The Holy Spirit came to each one personally. And individuality is again emphasized in verse 4: *everyone* (every one) *present was filled with the Holy Spirit...*

Of course, it's important for us as God's family to meet and worship together to help, exhort, and encourage each other. The writer of Hebrews emphasizes this:

Let us not give up meeting together... but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Even so, when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, we have a gentle reminder that whereas we are all members of one body, we are also individuals who are responsible to the Lord for keeping our own personal lamp trimmed, filled with oil and burning brightly, not depending on the sanctity of others to carry us along.

Jeremiah reveals another interesting aspect of God's *holy fire*, this time associated with His Word.

*"Is not My word like fire," declares the Lord....
(Jeremiah 23:29 - emphasis added)*

And in Jeremiah 20:9 the prophet asserts:

*...His Word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a
fire in my bones! (NLT - emphasis added)*

In Acts 2:3 we're told that the Holy Spirit came with flames or tongues *like fire* and in Jeremiah we're told God's Word is *like fire*. Can we conclude then that we should look to the Word of God, *like fire*, to brighten the flame of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

To pursue this thought even further, we have the reference in Ephesians that binds the performance of the Holy Spirit in our lives with the Word of God. We're told that the Spirit's Sword, the weapon He has given us for spiritual warfare, *is the Word of God. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.* And each Christian is *commanded to take it.* This is an emphatic command.

Considering the apparent bond between God's Holy Spirit and His Holy Word, there must be a firm link between this command to *take the Sword of the Spirit* and the Holy Spirit's ability to function effectively in our lives. So what does it mean to actually *take the Sword of the Spirit*?

Perhaps you're thinking, as many do, "Oh, that means we should be sure to read our Bible every day without fail." Would you think for just a moment about the last time you read your Bible? What specifically do

you recall of the passage you read? Have you found that with just a simple reading, or even a study, that you have adequate fuel to keep the fire of the Word burning brightly in your heart and life throughout the day and into the night?

Somewhere along the line we've picked up the idea that *taking the Sword of the Spirit* has to do with the ownership or maybe access to a *book*. I'm sure you've been in meetings where someone has asked, "How many of you have your sword in hand?" Then everyone holds up his Bible and proudly waves it in the air.

But let me ask you: Is that Book, that bundle of paper, your Sword? Praise God, His Word is printed on the pages of that book, but of what value is this to us if the powerful Word printed on its pages is not stored in our hearts to burn with purifying fire? Only then do we have constant access to it for the Holy Spirit to use on our behalf when we are out there on the front lines of life.

Does *owning* a Bible or carrying one around with us and referring to it every now and again imply its profound potential? Surely, it's only as we memorize this powerful Word that it becomes a flame and a Sword in our life.

A Pampered People

Jesus said:

Much is required from those to whom much is given, and much more is required from those to whom much more is given. (Luke 12:48, NLT)

What generation in all of history has enjoyed what has been lavished on us? Most of us own at least one copy of *God's Sword*, maybe two or three, or even more.

Who has ever had the abundance of Bibles and reference books; the spoon feeding of amplified truth that we Christians have fed into our lives on a daily basis; the tapes and literature available on every imaginable aspect of the Christian life; Christian radio and television 24 hours a day; unlimited access to endless resources from all over the globe on the worldwide web?

We have sermons, Bible studies, conferences, retreats and seminars taught by pastors, teachers, and counsellors and the list goes on. We have Scripture-related plaques, calendars, clocks, stationery, diaries, cookbooks, bookmarks, even bumper stickers and billboards, every imaginable reminder to decorate our lives.

Yet with all of this, how would you say we measure up to the Christian Church of past generations? With the early church, for example, who, because of their faith, faced lions and gladiators in the colosseum? People, like you and I, were drenched with oil and burned as torches to light the entrance of Caesar's parties. How would we react if we faced such a challenge or had to watch while our loved ones were so treated?

Or what about the spiritual giants of the 18th and 19th centuries who forsook comfort and convenience to give their lives out in the front lines of faith: John and Charles Wesley, Dwight L. Moody, Charles Finney, George Whitfield, Jonathan Goforth, Charles Spurgeon, Andrew Murray, William Carey, Hudson Taylor, David Brainard, George Mueller, Jonathan Edwards, "Praying"

Hyde, and many others. These were men who willingly *risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (*Acts 15:26 NLT*)

Could it be that all of our Bibles and spiritual luxuries, instead of strengthening us, have lulled us into a dangerous mind set of false security and sluggish apathy? Have we as individuals contributed our identity to a sea of mediocrity?

One Man

There was a man who lived in the 15th Century whose self-sacrifice and commitment to God stands out in history as an example of the impact that can be made by just *one* person. This one man probably did more to spark the reformation than any other human being. You may never even have heard his name. It was Giralomo Savonarola.

He was a monk who lived in Florence, Italy from 1452 to 1498. Desperate to see the Lord send a revival, he entered a monastery at age 22 to begin a life of prayer, fasting and seeking the Lord through memorizing His Word. He was *one man* who lived in a world filled with vice, immorality and corruption, such as we can hardly imagine. “What influence could *one* person have on such a society?” you might ask. What, indeed?

The impact of his life and commitment not only transformed the city of Florence, it resounded throughout all of Europe and eventually throughout the world, even to subsequent generations. Perhaps, if you and I could trace back our spiritual lineage, we would find this selfless man in our family tree.

We're told that there were times when Savonarola sat behind the pulpit that his face seemed to be illuminated with a heavenly glow. Such crowds came to hear him that the smaller churches couldn't hold them, and they had to use the large cathedral in Florence. People stood in line throughout the night waiting for the doors to open.

The revival that broke out as a result of his ministry resulted in tremendous moral change. The corrupt city government of Florence was overthrown, and he taught the people how to set up a democratic form of government. People stopped reading vile, worldly books. Merchants made restitution for the excessive profits they had been making. Hoodlums and street urchins stopped singing vulgar songs and began singing hymns in the streets. Huge bonfires were made of lewd books, obscene pictures, and worldly objects. Children marched from house to house in procession, singing hymns, and calling on everyone to repent.

Savonarola said that God had told him he would have only eight years to proclaim His message. And what happened at the end of eight years? He was brutally tortured by the church hierarchy who tried unsuccessfully to make him recant his stand. When he refused, "he was hanged and burned in the great square in Florence".*** His last words were, "Should I not die willingly for Him who suffered so much for me?"***

During this time, there was a young boy growing up in Germany who was greatly influenced by the life, ministry, and death of Savonarola. His name was Martin Luther.

If God could use just *one* such man living in an insignificant corner of the globe to bring a mighty revival in one of history's darkest hours, what could He accomplish through us, through you and me, if only *we* are willing to pay the price. Only God knows what could be accomplished. But are we willing to prepare the way with prayer as Savonarola did? Will we feed on God's Word by committing large portions of it to memory as he did?

In Ezekiel's time the Lord said:

"I looked for a man... who would... stand before Me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30)

As the Lord searches the hearts of His people today will He find *one* who is willing to utterly pay the price? Are you that person? Am I?

A pastor once commented in a sermon, "The world has yet to see what God can do through *one man* wholly yielded to Himself." A young man sitting in the audience vowed, "By God's grace, I'll be that man!" What is our heart's response to such a challenge?

Personal Revival

In that great revival verse, II Chronicles 7:14, the Lord says:

"...if (another big "if") My people, who are called by My name...."

People is a collective word. A group of *people* is made up of individuals. His *people* are you and me. As you've heard so often, the Lord isn't talking to "publicans and sinners" out there somewhere, but to His very own children — His family, *people... called by (His) name*. Neither is He addressing the masses as in mob rule. He's addressing *individuals* who together make up His precious family and His army. He says to us, to you and to me:

"...*if*(you)... *will* (then He names four things)
humble (yourselves)
and pray
and seek My face,
and turn from (your) *wicked ways,*
"then," (says the Lord) "*will I*
hear from heaven
and will forgive (your) *sin*
and will heal (your) *land.*" (*emphasis added*)

Many Bible teachers use this verse as a call to prayer for revival and well they should. But they often seem to present *prayer* as being the sole criteria on which this promise rests. *Prayer* is specifically stated as one of *four* conditions, but it is *only one*. Another catalyst may be more inclusive.

We have some understanding of what it is to *humble* ourselves, to *pray* and to *turn from sin*, but what exactly is meant by *seeking God's face*? According to *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, seeking the *face* of God, is "seeking His presence". Other than through prayer, how else can we pursue this in our lives? Savonarola apparently knew. It is through memorizing the *living Word of the living God* that

we *seek His face* and touch the very character of God. Savonarola not only prayed unceasingly for revival, the fire of God's Word burned brightly in His life as he ardently memorized large portions of Scripture and walked in its light, in life and in death.

Many of us have experienced intimate, personal revival as we have committed to memorizing Scripture in context. God's Word burns in our hearts and minds as all four factors mentioned in this verse are *amplified* and *intensified* in a way that was not otherwise realized.

We have found, as I'm sure also did Savonarola, that as we *seek the face of the Lord* in His Word, we experience a new and exciting awareness of His divine presence, His incomprehensible grace, and His awesome power.

Our *prayer life* takes on new dimensions as we experience Him intimately in His glory and majesty.

We are *humbled* as He graciously draws us to Himself, while *revealing our sin* and weaknesses, gently guiding us into a better way through the power of His Word. When we *read* our Bible, the Holy Spirit may vie for our attention as we pass lightly over a point of conviction. But when we *memorize* it, the Scripture is etched on our mind and soul. As we review and meditate on it, *we become increasingly aware of our sin* and His holiness in a profound and compassionate way. One young Christian and avid memorizer said:

I felt the Lord wanted me to start by memorizing the book of Obadiah. Then as His Words of condemnation for Edom sank deep into my soul, He uncovered my own prideful spirit. It has been a humbling and purifying process. I consider the

great privilege I have of memorizing God's very Words, to be the greatest gift He could have given me. It has changed my life!

From a young wife and mother:

The Lord used a *Sword of the Spirit* presentation at our church to inspire our family to begin memorizing the book of James. We have completed the first chapter and are excited about beginning the second. (Ed: They have since completed the entire book.)

It is wonderful to be able to meditate on a piece of Scripture. I don't think any of us really understood what that meant until we began memorizing James. I can't tell you how many times the Lord has brought to mind a verse that is just right for a certain situation and led me to dwell on the specific verse. It is not always what I want to hear, but it is always what I need to hear.

Memorizing large portions of Scripture has given us a context for the verses we memorize. It has given us a direction as a family and has taught us so much about the way the Lord would have us live our lives. The direction we need is with us when we need it.

It is memorizing chapters and books that lets our soul drink from the full context of the Word. Then we can fellowship with our Lord in ways that are not possible through any other means.

Some of us have known the Lord for years, but *the most profound movement of the Holy Spirit* in our lives has not come from sermons, or Bible Studies, or even from prayer without the power of the Word behind it. It has been the pure application of the holy Word of God to our hearts and minds as we memorized it in context and applied its truths to our lives.

In the words of one born to missionary parents and converted as a young child who is now a grandmother:

When I attended a *Sword of the Spirit* workshop and heard the book of Philippians quoted from memory, I wept the entire time because of the power of the Word. I went home resolved to memorize for myself. Although learning John 14 was a real struggle, I found it to be a life changing experience. The Word came alive in my heart and life. Even though I had been a Christian since early childhood, I discovered a new dimension to my Christian experience that was completely unknown to me. Even the deep, intensive nature of inductive Bible study (with two hours of homework each night) didn't compare with the power of the Word written on my heart as I memorized it and came to experience more of the very heart of my God.

I personally had been a Christian for 50 years, but it was not until I began memorizing chapters and books of Scripture that the Holy Spirit really had opportunity

to work in my heart, and I started to experience a meaningful walk with the Lord. Through memorizing, God's Word was branded on my mind and soul. It became *part of me*. It permeated my thinking, my prayer life, and my daily walk. I could no longer skim over convicting passages and quickly forget them. Even in reading, the Word now reveals a depth of meaning and "tangibility" that was not present before. Heaven and eternity with my Lord has become an awesome reality rather than just a fuzzy hope out there somewhere in the future.

Of course, reading and studying Scripture is a vital part of our Christian life and growth, but only when we memorize it *in its context* does it become a Sword in hand, a glowing fire in our life, and a source of constant joy that wells up from within.

Do you remember the old fashioned pump? As long as we pumped the handle up and down, water poured out the spout from the depths of the well, but when we stopped pumping, the flow of water stopped. This is kind of like *reading* Scripture. As long as we read it, we have it to drink in. When we stop, there's a residual benefit but there is no flow. When we *memorize* it, it's like an artesian well. There's a constant issue from within. The Fountain of Living Water is always there to drink from to nourish and sustain.

Revival = Desire + Diligence

Let me ask you: Is your soul thirsty for revival? In your life? In your church? In this country? I mean *really thirsty?*

“♪ ...my heart’s one desire is to be holy...♪” are words incorporated in a popular chorus. It’s a beautiful chorus and I know that singing it makes everyone feel pious because it does sound very spiritual. But this chorus always bothers me because it seems to imply that holiness and revival are the effortless products of *desire*; that *desire* is almost an end in itself.

Solomon cautioned us about this:

The soul of a sluggard desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich. (Proverbs 13:4, NKJV)

Although not specifically stated, the inference seems to be that *desire* alone is a non-entity. It is only as *desire* inspires *diligence*, that it is productive. For example, fruit doesn’t suddenly appear out of nowhere just because you crave a juicy morsel. Mere *desire* doesn’t produce fruit - ker plop - there it is, ripe and ready for the eating. Desire merely serves to stimulate action. Your longing for the finished product may inspire you to plant the seed or sapling. Then it has to be nourished and cultivated. With *time* and *diligence*, *watering* and *pruning*, it eventually grows into an adult tree. And in its season, edible fruit is finally realized.

In the same way, a *desire* for holiness, a *desire* to experience God’s power through the fire of His Word is not fruit, it is merely the seed. It is a seed that must be planted, nourished, and cultivated. It takes *time*, *diligence*, and *commitment* to introduce God’s holy Word into our

memory, our thinking, and our daily agenda. Nor will the prince of this world permit us to pursue such a course without opposition.

Do you remember the parable of the sower? The Lord warned us that as His Word is dispersed there will *always* be deterrents to discourage and frustrate. You can know that your enemy will be busy trying to destroy any seed of desire that has been sown both in the initial process of getting started *and* every step along the way.

When you start applying God's Holy Word to your life in this more concentrated form, you will undoubtedly face spiritual warfare that could be more vicious than you have ever known, not only the flesh and blood kind, but fierce, subtle darts, the kind that eat your time, distort your priorities, and bleed your emotions.

At one time Paul said:

...a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. (I Corinthians 16:9 NKJV)

I've always thought it interesting that Paul said "...*and there are many adversaries*," not "**but** *there are many adversaries*". Opposition, apparently, wasn't a surprise to Paul. He just took it for granted. He knew it was to be expected. Right now a great and effective door is wide open for you, *and you* can take it for granted that your adversary will do anything and everything to stop you from walking through it.

Earlier in this chapter we noted the correlation between God's Word and the working of His Holy Spirit in our lives. Now we see, more clearly, some of

the reasoning behind it. It is the *fire* of God's Word hidden in our hearts that fans the flame of the Holy Spirit and revival in our lives. It is this same Word, memorized and branded on our hearts and lives that is a Sword for the Holy Spirit to use against our ever avid enemy, an enemy who will oppose us every step of the way. He is well aware of the power available to Christians who take the Holy Scriptures seriously.

Who could attempt to reveal the total worth of God's Holy Word as it is made a vital part of a believer's life. Surely it is as vast and inevitable as its Author. Do you want to see revival in your life? Do you want your lamp to shine brightly in a darkening world? Yes, you may be only one person in a great sea of humanity, but you are one person. You have a great God, who has given you access to a powerful resource and an awesome weapon, if you will choose to activate it in your life.

Someone has said that many Christians "weep over beautiful truth, only to draw back when it comes to putting it into practice." Perhaps you have also heard it said, "*Truth that is unacted on is more dangerous than error.*"

I would caution you against allowing the enemy of your soul to rule victorious by letting the challenge of this chapter and this book become just part of an accumulation of truth deposited somewhere back in the graveyard of your mind.

**Right to Life statistics*

***Wesley Deuwel, Revival Fire (Zondervan Publishing House, 1995) pp. 44-48*

****H.H. Halley, Halley's Bible Handbook (Zondervan Publishing House, 88th printing, 1988) p. 786*