

MAY 1 . . .

Challenge your thinking!

Addressing Ideas that Influence Revival

Third-Grid Theology on Revival

By John R. Van Gelderen

Do revivals just spontaneously happen when God sovereignly chooses to send them? Can men make revivals happen? Or is there a biblical position between these two extremes? In the last article entitled “Third-Grid Theology” we made an analogy to the globe of planet Earth to help us understand the tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility. While there are two poles of thought, there is also an equator, which is not on either “side”. This we called “Third-Grid” theology and we discussed briefly the need to be in the equatorial region on the doctrine of salvation.

In the light of this analogy let’s now discuss third-grid theology on revival. Obviously the source and power of revival is God, but man is responsible to seek God’s reviving presence. If you so focus on man’s responsibility that you essentially leave God out as the source and power of revival, you can become disillusioned or embrace counterfeits. If you so focus on God’s sovereignty that you essentially leave out a responsible access, you can become fatalistic.

The key is to seek to be in the equatorial region that accepts the truth of divine initiation (convincement of truth) and divine enablement (fulfillment of truth), but also accepts the truth that is between the two divine works of God. This is man’s responsibility of faith (which is not a work, and therefore does not violate “all of grace”). This is the “Third-Grid.”

Not surprisingly men who have been clearly in one hemisphere of emphasis, but who were truly in the equatorial region were used of God in revival. For example in the First Great Awakening, George Whitefield was greatly used as a channel of revival. He was clearly a Calvinist on paper (and a thorough-going one at that), but in practice his emphasis was on man’s responsibility to believe. In practice he was “Third-Grid.” At the same time John and Charles Wesley were also greatly used in the Eighteenth-century Revival. Yet on paper they were unquestionably in the Arminian hemisphere. But they were close enough to the equator of truth in practice to also be used of God. Practice reveals what one really is at heart.

In the Second Great Awakening Asahel Nettleton and Charles Finney were used of God in revival (among many others). Even if you disagree with their theology especially on paper (and I do to some degree with both of these men), you have to admit that in practice they both were close enough to the equatorial region to be used of God. Historical study reveals that in practice, they contradicted some of what they emphasized on paper.

Another interesting example of equatorial proximity is Jonathan Edwards. Not only did he experience revival, he is known as the theologian of revival. I have read many of his writings and writings about him. Clearly in print he was Calvinistic. However, he believed enough in man’s responsibility to seek God that thorough-going Calvinists of his day differed with him, even accusing him of being a “moderate” Calvinist. Is this not an indication of “Third-Grid” proximity?



Duncan Campbell of the Lewis Revival (and many other revivals) was a Scottish Presbyterian. He was of strong Calvinistic roots. Yet he often said in his preaching that he did not believe in a conception of God’s sovereignty, which nullified man’s responsibility. As a result he was accused by his thoroughgoing Calvinistic brethren of being an Arminian. He was not an Arminian. But I do believe it could be demonstrated that he embraced what I’m calling “Third-Grid” theology.

My point is that one must be close enough to the equator of truth embracing both sides of a truth to be protected from extremes, which hinder revival. Certainly the extreme of man-centered formulas producing counterfeits as well as the extreme of fatalistic thinking producing deadness both need to be avoided. Yes, God must first awaken men to their need (source), and yes, revival comes from God (power). But in between divine conviction of need and divine revival blessing is man’s responsibility to

by faith seek God’s reviving presence without which God withholds His blessing. The lack of revival is man’s responsibility, not God’s. We know that man cannot manufacture true revival. But nor does revival just come

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when God sovereignly decides to send it regardless of whether or not anyone seeks His face. Rather, God has revealed that He responds to those who respond to Him. God actually intervenes and acts in behalf of those who set their trust in Him (Isaiah 64:4). Revivals do not just “happen.” The vast majority may be taken by surprise, but the intercessors are expectantly trusting God to work.

A classic biblical example of this comes from the life of Daniel toward the latter time frame of the captivity. In Daniel 9:2 Daniel says, “I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.” Daniel read Jeremiah’s prophecy regarding the captivity. The *seventy years* are mentioned in Jeremiah 25:12-13. However, Jeremiah 29:10-14 gives the most detail. Verse 10 says “For thus saith the Lord, that after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform My good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place.” Clearly the source of the remnant being restored back to the land (picturing revival) is in God. God declares *I will visit you*. But this does not mean that everything is inevitable. Verse 11 explains “For I know that thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” The promise of *I will visit you* is based on God’s *thoughts*. God’s *thoughts* are God’s plans, His purposes, we could even say His sovereign will. So based on God’s will (*the thoughts that I think toward you*), God gives His promise (*I will visit you*). But that still does not mean it will all be inevitable.

The next verses say “Then ye shall call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, **when** you search for Me with all your heart. And I will be found of you.” Therefore, based on God’s will (*the thoughts I think toward you*), He gives His promise (*I will visit you*); but He makes the promise conditional (*call upon Me...pray unto Me...seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall search for Me with all your heart*).

If the matter was “a done deal,” then when Daniel read this he could have taken the next taxi camel back to Jerusalem! But the next verse in Daniel shows his understanding of God’s real plan for human responsi-

bility. Daniel 9:3-4 reads “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes. And I prayed...” The contrite, earnest prayer is recorded in verses 4-19. In verse 17 Daniel prays “And cause Thy face [lit. presence] to shine.” His prayer pleads for God’s manifest presence, which is the key to revival.

Could there have been a more impossible scenario as the restoration of the remnant to the land? And isn’t it amazing it only took one Daniel – one intercessor – to make a wide-ranging impact!

The initial fulfillment came at the end of seventy years. The complete and final fulfillment will come in Christ’s coming physical kingdom. Yet the spiritual reality of God’s manifest, reviving presence can and ought to be sought for in the present spiritual kingdom of the church age. This is “Third-Grid” theology on revival.

Many are God’s promises for revival in both Old and New Testaments. These promises reveal God’s will – His sovereign will. It is faith that brings us into union with God’s will and unbelief that causes us to miss out on God’s will.

Just as in salvation God “will have all men to be saved” (I Timothy 2:4), but man is responsible to believe in Christ in order to come into union with God’s will, the same principle is true in the Christian life. Is it possible to miss out on God’s will as a believer? The answer is obviously yes. In fact, sadly many do miss the will of God for their lives through unsurrender and unbelief. God gives promises to His people that reveal His will – but man must believe. “For without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). This is true for revival as well. Let God stir you with the promises of His reviving presence. In doing so God is revealing His will through His Word. But don’t be fatalistic. Like Daniel trust God to fulfill His promises by seeking Him through God-dependent prayer. When God sends revival to others, they may think it just suddenly happened. You will know that it is certainly not of you. But you will also know the reality of coming into union with God’s will through faith (which is not a work), and thus find your *expected end*.



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