



Challenging your thinking!

Addressing Ideas that Influence Revival

What Now? What Christians Should Do in the Wake of Election Day

By Dr. Rick Flanders

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Ephesians 6:12

The apostle Paul was in prison when he, by the Spirit of God, admonished the Christians at Ephesus that the battle in which they were engaged was a spiritual one, with spiritual enemies, and not primarily with human adversaries. Of course, this fact was not readily evident because they had so many visible, flesh-and-blood enemies. Romans, Jews, the idol-makers of their city, and unbelievers of every type were seeking to harm them and hinder their work for the Lord. These antagonists had faces and names that the Christians all knew, and it was hard not to think of the battle as "against flesh and blood." However, the truth is that the conflict is indeed spiritual, and it is a fight with devils (principalities, powers, rulers of darkness, wicked spirits) who use the "wiles of the devil" as weapons in the war for the souls of men.

Often the visible world is affected by the invisible world. Read about the battle Daniel was fighting on his knees for the welfare of his people the Jews. His prayers for the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem are recorded in Daniel 9 and accompanied by the appearance of the angel Gabriel. They continue in Chapter 10 with another visit from a spiritual

being who speaks of the fight he was having with "the prince of Persia" and "the prince of Grecia," two "principalities" with whom he was doing battle in league with the angel Michael. The story continues through the rest of the book, with angelic beings playing important roles in the history of the nation Israel, both in what is now the past and also in the prophetic future. The realities of the spiritual world

must be accepted and recognized by Christian people in order for us to understand and deal with the realities of the physical world. Unfortunately, however, these realities are many times overlooked, and Christians resort to fighting futile wars with the human instruments of our demonic enemies and fail to win the real war.

The United States of America has been blessed by several experiences of national revival. The Great Awakening of the colonial period, the fifty-year Second Great Awakening of our early days as a nation, and the metropolitan revival campaigns led by great evangelists between the Civil War and World War I, swept multitudes into the family of God and did much to shape the history of this country. They were powerful examples of what happens when the Christians of a nation turn back to their God from carnality and worldliness, believe the promises of the Scriptures, and seek to evangelize sinners in the power of the Spirit. But these huge and seemingly unstoppable prairie fires all eventually died out. And when spiritual eyes examine the histories of their demise, it becomes evident that the cause has always been the same.

The eighteenth-century Great Awakening, led by spiritual giants such as Edwards and Whitfield, along with the Tenants and other good men, waned and died with the rise of the political controversies with Britain. The Second Great Awakening fizzled with the growing conflict over slavery. The powerful city-wide campaigns showed no sign of retreat until the temperance movement brought us Prohibition. These are the historic facts, and they all tell us something. When Christians are distracted from the work of saving sinners by the lure of a moral crusade or political cause, the revival soon dies. When the preachers became

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embroiled in the fuss with the Mother Country, the Great Awakening closed down. When evangelists became Abolition speakers, the Second Awakening finally collapsed. When Billy Sunday and others turned more of their attention to the political defeat of Demon Rum, their evangelistic efforts went down.

In more recent days, something like a revival among the fundamental Baptists happened in the 1960s and the 1970s, resulting in the salvation of many and the phenomenal growth of a number of churches. But in 1976, an im-

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portant election year, when fundamentalist leaders noticed that the exploding size of their movement gave them potentially great political power, things changed. The fight against abortion waxed great in its importance to many Baptists, and their potential as a political force to overturn its legalization became the focus of their attention. However, as the decade moved ahead, it became clear to some of their leaders that the Baptists were not quite big enough to overcome the pro-abortion establishment. For this reason their usual concern about separating truth from error was put aside for political purposes, and many allied themselves with Catholics and even cultists in the moral and political crusade to ban abortion. And the results of this crusade, although significant, were not what those involved had hoped. Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980, and he publicly credited the Moral Majority with his victory. However, the court decision that legalized abortion was not overturned in the 1980s, nor in the 1990s. Abortion has not been banned to this day! The crusade thus far has failed to reach its goal, although it did revitalize the Republican Party and elect several pro-life Presidents. But now the election of 2008 has left the Republican Party weak and in retreat, and the choice of Senator Obama as President appears to have postponed for a long time the possibility of banning abortion.

The abortion crusade also served to kill the revival among fundamentalists. The very things that produced such a large number of potential pro-life voters, intensive evangelism and strong faith in God, diminished greatly after Reagan was elected. In the 1980s, Sunday school attendance decreased across the country by literally millions. The soul-winning passion of hundreds and perhaps thousands of preachers and churches cooled, and once-strong and growing congregations shrank. It happened again. A moral and political crusade distracted those involved in the revival cause from the things that produce revival: prayer, holy living, evangelism, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

The ministries of the apostles "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:1-6), we are told. New Testament Christianity, when lived out by the followers of Jesus, always has a powerful effect on the world. Sometimes it brings revolutionary changes in society, including political, economic, and cultural changes. It has been correctly claimed

that the Great Awakening laid the foundation for the new American republic. The Second Great Awakening brought changes in the culture and in the churches which endured for more than a century. But the apostles did not turn the Roman world around by moral crusading or political campaigning. In Thessalonica, where the apostle Paul was accused of overturning his world, his method of operation was public, reasonable, scriptural, clear, and decisive proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus. Look again at Acts 17:2-4:

"And Paul, as his manner was, went unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few."

Today the people of God need to return to the old method.

When Jacob turned from sojourning to settling down (See Genesis 33:17-20), from following God's direction to making his own plans (See Genesis 31:13, 32:9-12, 33:19-20, and 35:1), and from upholding a separated witness for the true God to letting his family consort with the world (Genesis 34:1-2), his sons got involved in a bloody moral crusade that nearly destroyed his testimony. Read the story in Genesis 34, and remember that it is not our job to clean up the morals of unsaved people. It is our duty to point them to the salvation of God.

After the election of 2008, Christians in America certainly ought to continue to take advantage of their privileges as citizens of a democratic republic. They should raise their voices in behalf of the truth in the discussion of public issues. They should exercise their right to vote. They should consider running for office, and run if God directs. They should be involved in the political process but should not make politics the focus of their lives. We must be engaged more than ever in the spiritual battle that rages in our country and around the world. Our lives should be given to prayer, Spirit-empowered evangelism, building the church of Jesus Christ, and wrestling with the powers of darkness. It is time for a renewed and intensified quest for revival based upon confidence in the victory the Lord won for us at Calvary and the empty tomb. Great revivals have been quenched through wrestling with flesh and blood. What we need now is another great revival prolonged and strengthened by spiritual warfare in the power of God's might.

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