



## Revivals that are pleasing to God

***And Samuel spoke unto all the house of Israel, saying,  
If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts,  
then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtaroths  
and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only,  
and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines.***

**1 Samuel 7:3**

Many dark pages are found in the history book of the church. Many times the church can say and in thought did say, Ichabod, the glory of the Lord has departed from His people.

The setting and history of Israel here is known to all who know their Bible. In the time of battle, and in fear, Israel had taken the ark with them on the battlefield. It was a move of religious formalism. If only the ark is with us, they thought, then the Lord will bless us with His presence and victory. But it didn't turn out that way.

The enemy took the ark. They put it next to their idol god, Dagon, in their temple. But that didn't "work out." First, Dagon fell down, the next morning his head and hands and feet had broken off. So this had to change. But wherever the ark was taken the people were in, trouble. They were afflicted with boils and mice. They had God, so they thought, in their midst. But the truth was that God, the God of Israel, was against them. The ark was moved from city to city. But nobody wanted it. What this all really means is that they wanted to get rid of God but couldn't. It's just a little picture of hell. Finally with some superstitious moves, on a cart pulled by two cows, the ark was returned. They were relieved. Israel was so glad.

But had things and conditions really changed now in Israel? Sure, they had the ark with them, but the Philistines obviously continued to rule over them, subjecting them likely to taxes and other forms of foreign rule. There was still something seriously lacking. And so it remained for a long time. Is that the way of the church of God?

Is this something new in the history of the church? The truth is that we find it in the records of the history of the church again and again. Today, living in the age of the great apostasy, it surely is also true. Is this too negative? Too severe? Not if it is the truth. And it is!

Of course, the church in America and other countries, still have God with them. We still have the blessed gifts of liberty, freedom of worship, many activities in the church. And last but not least, we still have the Bible, which is still the most popular book in our land.

But with it all we do the same thing Israel did. While we are religious we serve our idols. Israel kept their idols; that's obvious from the fact that Samuel warns them so severely to put away their idol gods. We too have our idol gods, *with* our religion.

In all of the history of Israel there is no sin mentioned more and practiced more than that of idolatry. And there is no man blamed more than Jeroboam, of whom we read that he made Israel to sin in setting up the idols in Dan and Bethel. Very noteworthy it is that the way of fearing God for Israel was not to get rid of their idols. No, they kept them *with* their religion. They wanted both.

Isn't this always true? The biggest idol we all have is ourselves. And with it goes the dreaded dry rot of lethargy, indifference and lack of interest. Obvious this is in many areas; in lack of time for family worship, with poorer church attendance at the second service, with a decline of interest in

the study of the Word personally and in society life, and in no time to read Christian literature. The biggest enemy and danger of the church today is apathy.

Of course, people pray. Well and good. But how do people often pray? For what do they pray when there is illness, an accident, a threat of war or some calamity? Often people pray only to get rid of the physical distress to have a better life on earth. Is this wrong? Of course not. But then we are using God purely for ourselves, our physical welfare. That with our adversities we may also become more spiritually minded, seek the Lord more, and become better Christians one often hears little of.

The idea of being Pilgrims and strangers in this attractive world is becoming ever more foreign to the pattern of our complex lives and the very thoughts of our busy minds.

Much of this is brought on by material prosperity. Spurgeon says often that prosperity is the greatest trial of the church. Solomon, the wisest man on earth of that day, couldn't take it and few people can do so today.

Interesting it is that we read that while the ark was at Kiriath-jearim Israel lamented after the Lord. Wasn't that good? Apparently not because Samuel warns them in spite of it. This we can understand when we know the meaning of the word lament. It means here to nag, to beg. It reminds one of a child who continues to follow his mother begging, coaxing, nagging until he receives what he wants. The Dutch word, "zaniken" describes the thought beautifully. This Israel did. How they prayed! In our day with the same kind of practice we might have prayer meetings, be exhorted to pray more, also with more fervency. But the Lord apparently is not satisfied with this kind of praying. He still rebukes for this.

Then young Samuel appears on the scene. And what a leader and godly man he is. What does he tell the people?

Serve the Lord with your *hearts*! That's where it begins. That's where we must all examine ourselves. That's the source of it all. Jesus asks later, where is your heart? From it are all the issues of life. In that context Samuel tells the Israelites to put away their strange gods of Baal and Ashtaroth (Mrs. Baal).

It is the way first of all of knowing God in all His love in our Savior Jesus Christ, in our hearts. It implies that we know the gracious gift of forgiveness of sins. Such knowledge calls for confession of sins and repentance from them. With those blessed new hearts it means constant self-examination, self-denial and mortification of the old man. We need many prayers for the strength of the Spirit, to serve Him only and not our idols. The word is constant vigilance against the Pharisaistic vacillation between two gods, that "halting between two opinions." It means that we love the Lord much.

Doing this He promised to the Israelites that He would deliver them out of the hand of the Philistines.

May the Lord ever more open our eyes to see all the strange gods we serve today. And may we taste more of His love and receive more of His Spirit to put them far from us. And with all the good emphasis of spiritual activities, church services, Bible reading, prayer life and other spiritual exercises may we see that God first of all wants us to keep the first commandment, from the heart. Lord, so bless us.

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