CONVICTED, BUT REDEEMED

Last week, I was thinking about our upcoming revival, when I came across and article by the Christian writer, Shane Idleman. His words struck me because he expressed a very real thought that has occurred to me as well. These were his introductory remarks: “***As we all know, America is in a spiritual decline with no recovery in sight. Many churches have a form of ‘microwave’ Christianity: Service times last just over an hour, prayer is glanced over, and worship is designed to entertain the masses. Many pastors avoid offending their audience and seek to be motivational rather than convicting. If we truly want to see revival, the face of the present-day church needs to change. Granted, there are wonderful churches, but as a whole, we have drifted significantly off course***.”[[1]](#endnote-1) Shane, I truly feel your pain. It is absolutely true—The Church in America has gotten far off course. And the reason for this is mainly because it has gotten away from the ***convicting*** Word of God—for God’s Word is truly ***convicting***, and last thing anybody wants to hear today is that they are convicted of something. Why?—well, to be convicted of something implies that you have been judged wanting in your behavior—i.e., you are judged to be guilty of something. And the only definite sin that our society recognizes today is the sin of being judgmental. So, we feel no sense of revival in our churches because there is no general sense on anyone’s part that they need to change. And they feel comfortable to remain just as they are because they don’t realize just how guilty they happen to be—not in the pastors’ eyes—but in the eyes of God. And because of their complacent attitude, there is no urgency to change anything in their lives. And as long as that malaise among those who identify as Christians continues, no revival is ever going to occur in this country until the truth of God’s Word is given to them and accepted by them. Only then, will they realize the pitiful, sinful state to which they have sunk. I am talking about Christians now—not just your basic heathen on the street.

Look around you. Look at the empty seats. I may be wrong, and I hope that I am, but if you were to take a drive this morning over to the Food Lion in Gordonsville or the one in Louisa Courthouse, or over to the Tractor Supply Store, or move on down to Walmart at Zions Crossroad, it would not surprise me in the least to find some of our own former church-goers standing there in the check-out line even as I now speak. And if a news reporter or some researcher for a polling company were to interview them and ask them if they thought they were saved, they’d likely answer, “***Oh yes—I was saved a long time ago***.” Really? Saved for what? For heaven . . . or for hell?—because those who are saved for heaven love God. And because they love Him they find delight in coming to worship Him in His House on Sundays. They love to congregate and sing hymns of praise to God, and pray, and have fellowship with other like-minded believers. The Scriptures implore us:  “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Colossians 3:16 (NASB) If you want to have the best opportunity for the Gospel message to indwell in you, Church is the best place to start and to stick with. That’s why church attendance isn’t optional. The Bible is clear on your obligation in this regard and commands: 24  “Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. 25  Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.” Hebrews 10:24-25 (TEV) That last part is important too because the day of the Lord is closer than you might think.

On Labor Day, someone knocked at our door and it was a young woman who had visited us a couple times before—and she is a Jehovah Witness. And I have had some truly long conversations with her standing there on our front porch. And we must have talked for over 30 minutes during this last visit. And, during that time, we both bemoaned the terrible spiritual decline in our country—with all the violence, mass shootings and general lack of morality. And to her credit, she turned to 2nd Timothy and read: 1  But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2  For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3  unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4  treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5  holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NASB) Isn’t that a picture of our world today?

And yet many Christians seem to be so indifferent to these terrible conditions or just shrug their shoulders and walk away as if it is no concern to them. With all these terrible things going on around us in America today, who can claim to love God and yet fail to see the need to gather in His Church on Sunday to offer thanks as a corporate body of believers for our many blessings?—one of them being that we have at least survived into another week. For those who should be occupying these pews this morning, or the pews of some other Christian Church, my question is this: ***Where is their faith?*** The Apostle Paul teaches us: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through preaching Christ.” Romans 10:17 (TEV) I could be wrong, but the last time that I was in Food Lion, or Tractor Supply or Walmart, I don’t think they were preaching the message of Jesus Christ. I don’t recall hearing the Gospel on any of their store intercoms. And for those who claim to be Christians, yet stand in those check-out lines this morning, or are riding their mowers or swinging their weed-eaters or tending their flowers or gardens, or whatever else they ***love*** to do on the Lord’s Day—I suspect that Jehovah Witness is a lot closer to heaven than any of them are right now. (And you in my Sunday School class know my position of the prospects of salvation regarding the Jehovah Witnesses.)

If the Church wants a revival, then its ***active*** members—its ***true*** believers—need to start taking some risks. You, me, every one of us—we all need to take the risk that someone might be offended, that someone might accuse us of being judgmental, and despite this risk we need to go ahead and witness to people—including our Christian sisters and brothers who have fallen away from the faith. And since we appear to be so very close to the End of Time (and I believe that we are), maybe we shouldn’t be so surprised by the fact that they have fallen away, for the Scriptures tell us: “The Spirit says clearly that some people will abandon the faith in later times; they will obey lying spirits and follow the teachings of demons.” 1 Timothy 4:1 (TEV) But even so, it isn’t too late for them to hear the very things that can still save them—that they, like us, are sinners, and that they need to repent, that they—along with you and me—need to come together into God’s House and pray for the forgiveness of our sins. Then, all of us need to offer praises and hymns to God and worship Him. Spread that message. Let people know that we are here. Better yet, let people know that the Spirit of Christ is here—and that they are sin-sick, but Jesus can heal them!

Now, having said all this, I want you to listen carefully. There is only one way to be saved, and that is through the grace of God by faith in Jesus Christ.[[2]](#endnote-2) As much as I would love to have a church full of people, as much as I would like to baptize a thousand people as a result of our upcoming revival, merely sitting in these pews of this church, or in any other church for that matter, or being submerged in the waters of baptism—these things ***alone*** are not going to save anyone. If you base your salvation solely upon the fact that you were baptized, then baptism didn’t do anything for you except to get you wet. And merely sitting in a church won’t make you a true Christian any more than sitting in a Lion’s Club meeting will make you a lion. Being baptized is very important—it is your public proclamation of faith in Christ. But once you proclaim it, you actually have to do something. You have to continuously live out your faith—day by day, week by week, year by year. How do you do that?—by the way you think, in the choices that you make, and in the things that you do—and in all of these things showing your love for God. And another thing that springs from a life of true faith is this: You won’t be able to contain some wonderful news; rather, you’ll want to spread that news—the Good News that Jesus runs a hospital that’s ready to cure their sickness. It’s a hospital called “***Church***.” Its doors are open to them free of charge. They don’t have to have any money, and the only health care plan that Jesus requires them to follow is the one written down between the covers of the Bible. And until people begin to realize that they are sick, that they are guilty and ***convicted of sin*** and need a Savior, there won’t be any revival in America at all.

The sad truth is that those who are convicted of sin are headed to prison. But it’s the one with no parole—it’s an eternal sentence in a prison called Hell. True revival of the Church can start to change that destination for so many. But, to have a successful revival, three things need to happen. And these three things can be illustrated in some true stories that came to my attention this past week—all of them, oddly enough, deal with the judicial system.

The first thing that we need to do to have a revival is for us to begin to recognize our own sinful state, and then want to do something about shedding that sinful condition. In 2008, Paul Herbert, a municipal court judge from Ohio, was trying to teach his teenage daughters that they needed to look to Jesus Christ to find any purpose in life. And to do this, he was using Rick Warren’s book, *The Purpose Driven Life—*a book that I could certainly recommend to anyone. He was a bit taken off guard when one of his daughters turned to him and asked, “*Daddy, what's***your** *purpose in life*?” And he thought about that because he wanted his purpose in life to be serving God in all that he did—especially in his work as a judge. So, that night, he offered a prayer to God to help him maintain the right attitude toward his work. He prayed: “***I realize that . . . not many people get this opportunity [to sit as a judge]. Can you show me some way that I could be significant for You in my work?***” Many months passed, and he had the run-of-the-mill domestic violence victims pass before him—each with their own very real, very sad story to tell. And then one day, a young woman came before him on a prostitution charge. And something clicked in his heart as his prayer to God was answered by an opportunity for him to be a “***light***” in the courtroom. And in that “***light***”, Judge Herbert began to see something that he’d failed to recognize before. He realized just how much this young prostitute looked exactly like so many of those domestic violence victims that had been coming before him time after time. And the dullness and routine nature of all these repetitious cases seemed to fall away as the Holy Spirit, indeed, clicked on a “***light***” in that courtroom. And the Judge realized that maybe he was the one who should be ***convicted***—convicted of having failed to apply his faith in the work place.

And so, he became instrumental in implementing a new two-year program called ***CATCH Court***, which stands for ***Changing Attitudes to Change Habits***. In this program, women convicted of prostitution receive drug treatment and counseling, and report back to the Judge on a weekly basis to monitor their progress. Judge Herbert was pleased to report the success of some of these former prostitutes who completed his program. One of these women, he says, had been “***sold when she was a little girl by her mother to older men for crack cocaine. Today she is [taking courses] at Columbus State Community College***.” Another woman had been enslaved by a motorcycle gang and repeatedly raped, then transported to other gangs and sold for sex, and eventually became a heroin addict. But, now, she’s been completely drug-free for two years.

And yet, none of those changed prostitutes were the biggest transformation that resulted from that “***light***” in the courtroom—that ***Light of the Holy Spirit***. No, the greatest transformation of all was the one that Judge Herbert himself experienced. It was the spiritual transformation that came about in **his *own life***. The Judge expressed this change in himself as follows: “***The Holy Spirit continues to reveal how much I’ve been forgiven, and how similar I am to the individuals that come before me. That’s really hard to say! [My] job is to judge. But the farther I go along [in my faith], the more I realize that I’m just like most of them—and that makes me more understanding, more kind, more merciful***.”[[3]](#endnote-3) Judge Herbert displayed that first element that’s essential for a revival—again, recognizing your own sinful condition, and wanting to change it, as we go about helping others to change as well. But, when you witness to others—those who linger in checkout lines and ride their lawn mowers on Sunday mornings, remember those comments of Judge Herbert. Better yet, remember the Word of God. Remember Luke 18:9-14, and Jesus’ comparison of the prayer of the “***righteous***” Pharisee, and the one offered by the “***despised***” tax collector. Before we give witness of the Good News to anyone, offer that tax collector’s prayer to God—the prayer that says: “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Now I will almost guarantee you that when you do witness in this way, someone is bound to respond: “***I really don’t need to come to church to show my faith, I like to show my faith in the good things that I do***.” You see, there is a real problem with that because they have the false belief that the “***good things they do***” (i.e. their “***works***”) are credited to them as “***faith***”—but really it’s the other way around. They have the equation backwards. I don’t care how many “***good things you do***,” all of them rolled together can never add up to actual ***faith*** in Christ; i.e., a million good works are never a substitute for ***true faith***. The Church will never have a revival until its people start showing ***true faith*** in God, and stop trying to rely upon this phony notion about “***doing good works***” as an excuse for failing to come into the House of God and worshipping Him on Sundays. This is illustrated in a second courtroom scene that involved the great collapse of the giant telecommunications company, Worldcom, about 17 years ago.

A man named Bernard Ebbers was the former CEO of Worldcom. And he stood before a judge after having been convicted of defrauding his company of about $11 billion dollars. And so his defense attorney pled with the judge that he would show Mr. Ebbers mercy. The attorney produced 169 letters from Ebbers’ friends citing the many ***good things*** that Mr. Ebbers had done over the years, including the many gifts that he had made to so many charitable organizations. (I guess you can afford to be charitable when you have stolen $11 billion dollars.) And then the attorney stated, in an almost tearful voice (we attorneys are such good actors, you know): “***Judge, if you live 60-some-odd years [like Mr. Ebbers has], if you have an unblemished record, if you have endless numbers of people who attest to your goodness, doesn’t that count? Doesn't that count particularly on this day?***” Well, it apparently didn’t count with that judge because he sentenced Mr. Ebbers to 25 years in the federal penitentiary. [[5]](#endnote-5)

And it isn’t going to have any sway with Jesus either on Judgment Day. Why?—because the Scriptures are clear that ***you are saved by faith alone in Christ***, and ***not by* *anything that you do***—no matter how many good things they may be.[[6]](#endnote-6) Works don’t produce faith; rather it is faith that produces good works. Faith is the tree, and good works are its natural fruits. That is why James says: “Faith that doesn’t show itself by good works is no faith at all—it is dead and useless.” James 2:17 (TLB) And that’s the message for us to deliver if we ever want a revival that actually ***spiritually revives*** anybody. It’s the message that people need to come to God ***in faith***, rather than foolishly trying to enter Heaven merely on the merits of their ***good deeds***, but without any ***true faith in Christ***. And oh man, when you tell them that they will insist that they do, in fact, have faith in Christ. But, their idea as to what faith is all about is seriously flawed. You see, faith in Jesus is much more that merely believing that He’s the Son of God. It’s much more that believing in God in general. Again, James explains: 19 “Are there still some among you who hold that ‘only believing’ is enough? Believing in one God? Well, remember that the demons believe this too—so strongly that they tremble in terror! James 2:19 (TLB) ***Faith and belief in Jesus Christ requires that you love Him***. And those who love Him want to be near Him. And Jesus tells us that when we gather to worship Him, as we do here in this church each Sunday—it is then that Jesus is near to us.[[7]](#endnote-7) Those who love Jesus worship Him in church in order experience His nearness; but, ***those who only pretend to love Him find other places to go and other things to do on Sunday mornings***. It’s not too hard to recognize those who truly love Jesus and those who don’t. In fact, Jesus put it this way: “You will know them by what they do”—particularly what they do or don’t do on Sunday. Matthew 7:16 (TEV) Quite honestly, it is as simple as that.

Now that third judicial example that reveals to us an important understanding that leads to revival is this: We need to understand that no one is beyond redemption if they will acknowledge their sins, repent and accept Jesus as their Savior. But, when it comes to sharing the Gospel with others, some Christians just don’t seem to accept that. Rather, they’ll say, “***Look man, you don’t understand. I run with a really rough crowd and they are not worth witnessing to because they are too hardened; they are too far gone. Witnessing to them would be a waste of time.***” Well, they might say that and it might be true that they run with a pretty tough crowd. But, I doubt if that crowd of theirs is any tougher than the prison inmates who reside in the Coffield Maximum Security Prison off Interstate 45 down in the State of Texas. Most of the guests at this facility are career criminals of the hardest sort who have committed some of the vilest crimes imaginable. It’s a really tough crowd there in that prison, but not so tough that the love of Jesus Christ cannot enter in and change some of the hardest of hearts of those inmates.

One Wednesday night back this past June, five inmates from the solitary confinement unit of this prison stood in line and waited for something. They weren’t waiting for pardons, because they had already been pardoned. They had already been pardoned because they truly believed in Jesus Christ. And yet they stood there waiting. Waiting for what? They were waiting to make a proclamation. The proclamation by which they confessed with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and that they believed with all their hearts that God raised Him from the dead so that they could be saved. And with that proclamation, right there in a church that had been planted in that hardest of prison soils, they were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.[[8]](#endnote-8) How in the world did a church get planted in a prison? Well, because the members of nearby Gateway Church in Dallas decided that it was time to spread God’s invitation to this roughest of crowds. And during a worship service in July, the pastor from Gateway Church baptized 15 additional inmates who’d been in solitary confinement along with 22 more from the general prison population. Commenting on this, Craig DeRoche, of the Prison Fellowship organization, states: “***Even if someone is incarcerated, that doesn’t mean they lose their value in the sight of God***.” [[9]](#endnote-9)

And that’s a good thought to hold going into this week before our Homecoming and Revival because there are a lot of people walking the streets today who are far more incarcerated than any of those baptized inmates in Texas. Those inmates know something that only a spiritual revival can reveal—for they know that they were once convicted, but are now redeemed. While prison cells may hold their bodies, their souls now enjoy the freedom that only Jesus can give. For “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” John 8:36 (NIV) Pray for our revival in this church. And when you pray, remember those words of Shane Idleman: “***If we truly want to see revival, the face of the present-day church needs to change.”*** Pray that that change in the Church will reflect a true change of attitude among those who have not fully committed to Jesus Christ—a change marked by that transformation of heart and mind that only the ***convicting Word of God*** and the ***redeeming Blood of Christ*** can bring about.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church

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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor

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1. Shane Idlman, “America’s Microwave Christianity—The Heart of the Present-Day Church Must Change, ChristianHeadlines.com (August 30, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Acts 4:11-12 (NLT2) 11  For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, ‘The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.’ 12  There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.” Shane Idlman, “America’s Microwave Christianity—The Heart of the Present-Day Church Must Change, ChristianHeadlines.com (August 30, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “[Judge Finds a New Way to Help Convicted Prostitutes,”](https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2012/july/1072312.html) PreachingToday.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Luke 18:9-14 (NLT2) 9  Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 10  “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. 11  The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! 12  I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ 13  “But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ 14  I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. ###  [“Convicted CEO's Good Works Don't Count,” PreachingToday.com.](https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2005/august/convictedceosgoodworksdontcount.html)

 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ephesians 2:8-9 (HCSB) 8  For you are saved by grace ***through faith***, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— 9  ***not from works***, so that no one can boast. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Matthew 18:20 (TEV) For where two or three come together in my name, I am there with them. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Romans 10:9 (NLT2) If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Lee Weeks & Jerry Pierce, “First Step Act Gives Prisoners a Second Chance at a New Life,” Decision Magazine, September, 2019, pp. 34-35. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)