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## THOUGHTS ON REVIVAL

In this bonus section we will examine what I believe is the number one hindrance to God pouring out His Spirit upon the land in revival and spiritual awakening. When I speak on this topic invariably people ask for it in written form. I've sketched out a few key truths on this subject so that you might be informed, challenged, and encouraged.

### NATIONAL REVIVALS CAN HAPPEN

Biblically and historically there have been times when God has turned a whole nation back to Himself. Examples would include Judah under Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah, Nineveh under Jonah, and the three great awakenings of America. All these revivals typically follow a pattern. They occur at times of great spiritual darkness in which godliness and interest in the things of God are fading or lost. A remnant becomes burdened; they cry out to God; then God suddenly comes down and gloriously turns the nation back to Himself. In the revival of 1858 approximately 1,000,000 Americans out of a population of 30,000,000 were saved in two years time. I personally witnessed the effects of a revival in Kenya in 1990 in which 30,000 people turned to Christ during a two week period. These examples reveal that a national revival is possible, but in order for that to happen we must recapture a foundational understanding about God, without which nothing else will be set into motion.

The Bottom Line:

- Revival can come to any people that turns to God, regardless of their present condition.

### OUR NUMBER ONE HINDRANCE

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God gave four conditions that must be met before He heals a land, "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." In response to the need of the hour many denominations and parachurch organizations over the last 20 years have marshalled prayer for God to "heal our land." To date God has not only failed to grant our cry, but has turned the nation over to increasing perversity and godlessness. That ought to make us stop dead in our tracks. If our greatest need is a massive outpouring of God's Spirit in revival and awakening, and a significant number have been crying out for that very thing, yet God has stayed His hand, might that not indicate that there's something we're failing to grasp? The problem stems from ignoring the preceding verse. 2 Chronicles 7:13 reads, "When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people..." The promise to send revival in verse 14 is set in the context of a God inflicting drought, crop devastation and plague on His own people. This picture paints God behaving in a way that the majority of professing Christians either no

longer believe He does, or they've never thought about. However, the whole promise of healing the land first requires recognition of the disciplinary action of God. If a people has no sense of a relational problem with the Almighty, then they can never realize their need to turn. Instead they will end up praying for a move of God like those in Isaiah 58:3 "Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? Why have we afflicted our souls, and You take no notice?'" – yet without result.

Recognizing the activity of God's discipline in the earth requires a fundamental assumption about God's character – that He can and will exercise painful disciplinary actions when He is seeking to turn an ignorant or unresponsive people back to Himself. This assumption is so little addressed in our pulpits today that God's people do not know how to recognize or respond to God when these things happen. In fact, in many circles Christians are taught that a loving God, a God of grace could never behave this way at all. However, our modern understanding of God does not reflect the dominant opinion held by Americans for the majority of our history. For example, on March 30, 1863 at the height of the Civil War, the United States Senate drafted a resolution calling for a national day of prayer. Notice their interpretation of the War from the excerpt that follows:

And, insomuch as we know that, by His divine law, nations like individuals are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world, may we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war, which now desolates the land, may be but a punishment, inflicted upon us, for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole People?

For most of American history, national catastrophes and wars were times when people examined themselves to see if they were under the disciplinary action of God. In our day, however, we no longer fear God. Could you imagine what would have happened to President Bush if he had raised the possibility that 9/11 might have been a wake up call from God? Yet, in 1863 the U.S. Senate and President Lincoln attributed the Civil War, in which 600,000 Americans lost their lives, as a probable judgment of God on the nation for our sins. Their fear of God led them to recognize they were under the judgment of God and return to Him. Today neither the majority of God's people nor the nation fear God. Until we return to a biblical theology like our forefathers, we cannot have revival.

The Bottom Line:

- Revival cannot come to a people who are unaware that they have a problem with God.
- Our number one hindrance to revival is the loss of the fear of God. The fear of God is not merely respect; it recognizes God as an authority figure who requires accountability.
- When people quit paying attention to other means of correction, God will inflict judgments to communicate a problem exists.
- We must repent of our flawed understanding of God, not sinful behaviors only.

## WHAT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD IS

For most Christians the phrase “the judgment of God” conjures up images of an angry, red face, emotional deity breathing out fiery wrath upon the objects of His displeasure. Therefore, most believers prefer the word discipline over the word judgment when referring to how He deals with His people’s sin. The only problem is that the word discipline is used sparsely in the Bible, whereas the word judgment or judge is by far and away the one that Scripture most often employs when it speaks of God passing sentence on sin – even on His own people (Ps. 51:4, Heb. 10:30, 1 Pet. 4:17). A false understanding of judgment as springing from a God without love, mercilessly wreaking vengeance in His hatred, has led Christians to assume they cannot ever be under the judgment of God. Understanding the nature of judgment explains why God prefers this term, without calling into question His love or redemption.

A judge’s job is to evaluate behavior and then render an appropriate verdict. Verdicts are not based upon emotional anger, but rather a decision which fits the deeds of the offender. God’s judgments, therefore, are the one-to-one correspondence of repaying someone according to what his actions deserve. Notice how this worked in the following 3 examples: 1. David used the sword to kill Uriah – therefore, the sword never departed from his house. He took Uriah’s wife in secret – therefore, God turned David’s wives over to another to sleep with in public (2 Sam. 12:9-12). 2. God decided Ben-Hadad should be put to death. Ahab spared Ben-Hadad’s life – therefore, God told Ahab it would be his life for Ben-Hadad’s (1 Kgs. 20:42). 3. Israel whored after other lovers – therefore, God gathered those lovers around her to kill her (Eze. 16:35-42, esv). For the lost person justice demands that a sinner’s rejection of God be repaid with God’s rejection of that sinner. For the Christian the punishment of eternal death was paid at the cross, but the holiness of God still demands accountability for disobedience. Therefore, a Christian can be under judgment and still be under grace. God’s love is not called into question, yet the severity of accountability can be of inestimable proportions. This is why David could be totally forgiven of adultery and murder, and yet the baby born to him died, the sword never departed from his house, and 20,000 of his subjects died in Absalom’s rebellion (2 Sam. 12-18:7). Or for a New Testament example, Jesus could warn church followers of Jezebel in Thyatira that He would kill her children with death, then “all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.”

When bad things happen to someone or a nation, that does not necessarily indicate the judgment of God. When God renders a verdict, it will be in line with what the deeds of the individual or nation deserve. For example, if I stole lunch money from my schoolmate growing up, then my 16 year old is killed by a drunk driver, that is not the judgment of God. But if I do not tithe, then I have financial setbacks or an inability to become financially stable, that most likely is the judgment of God.

The Bottom Line:

- Judgment is not the actions of a tirading God, angrily out to get someone who has offended Him. It is the rational, cool, calculated decision of justice tailoring the verdict to what the individual’s deeds merit.
- Someone is under judgment when events occur that fit his deeds.

- A Christian will not suffer eternal judgment of separation from God, but may incur temporal judgments in this life due to disobedience.

## JUDGMENT BEGINS AT THE HOUSE OF GOD

A fundamental truth of Scripture is “to whom much is given, much is required;” therefore, judgment always begins with God’s people because they have been granted infinitely more than the world. We have salvation, the covenant, the promises, the Holy Spirit, everything we need for life and godliness in Christ Jesus, a High Priest who ever lives to intercede for us, and a host of other blessings. God holds accountable first those who have received most. For this reason judgment begins with us, then moves outward to the lost world. When we ignore the relationship with God, fail to participate in His work, misrepresent His name, or neglect allowing God to conform us to the image of His Son, then God requires accountability of us. Under the Old Covenant God removed the ten northern tribes and handed Judah over to Babylonian destruction. Under the New Covenant Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead, Corinthians became weak, sick, or died for taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner, and Jesus warned five of the seven churches in Revelation of judgments He would exercise upon them for sin. For this reason Christians must repent before we can lead our nation in repentance. David wrote in Psalm 51:12-13, “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.” Revivals have always followed the pattern that God’s people return to Him, then lost people are saved. We must follow the prescription of 2 Chronicles 7:14 to turn from our wicked ways before the land is healed.

The Bottom Line:

- Judgment begins at the house of God because He holds accountable first those who know most.
- When Christians recognize judgment and respond in repentance, then a great harvest of lost souls follows.

## JUDGMENT COMES IN STAGES

God has designed judgment to come in stages of escalating intensity over time until either repentance or destruction occurs. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul outlines three stages of how this works in an unrepentant society. God first turns them over to sexual immorality (vs. 24-25), then homosexuality (vs. 26-27), then a completely debased mind given to all manner of wickedness (vs. 28-31). Similarly, under the Old Covenant God outlined stages of how He would deal with His own people when they refused to repent (Leviticus 26:16, 21, 24, 28). Avery Willis has identified seven stages of what this typically looks like today. They are: 1. God convicts of sin (if we repent that is the end of it). 2. God warns (He convicts a second time). 3. God is silent (The loss of God’s voice ought to be a great crisis for a believer). 4. God brings pain (God either allows or causes trouble in our life to get our attention). 5. God removes His hedge of protection (God allows loss of that which pertains to us). 6. God turns us over to our sin (Sinful patterns dominate our lives). 7. God destroys (That person or nation perishes).

The Bottom Line:

- Judgment usually comes in stages of escalating intensity over time until either repentance or destruction occurs.

## GOD'S INTENDED USE OF JUDGMENT

God works in stages in order to lead us to repentance. God intends the increasing severity to create questions regarding why these things have come upon us, thus God spreads judgment out over time to allow for reflection. When an individual or nation realizes God is judging them, then they may repent and be restored. If an individual, family, church, or nation refuses to repent after multiple opportunities over a prolonged period of time, then the holiness of God demands that individual, family, church, or nation be destroyed without remedy. The first six stages of judgment are remedial (corrective); the last stage is final (destruction). All judgments prior to a final judgment are for our benefit, intending to lead us to repentance; therefore, we should never lose heart upon recognizing the judgment of God. But we had better respond quickly. The window of opportunity lasts for an amount of time determined by God. He granted the Jews three to four years in Jesus day (Luke 19:41-44), whereas the Ninevites only had 40 days (Jonah 3:4). The point is no one should ever push it to find out. I would not presume to know the amount of time left to our nation, but based on the stages of judgment, we are clearly toward the back end of the process.

The Bottom Line:

- The process of judging in stages is intended to awaken us to repentance.
- When we realize we are under the judgment of God, we should take courage that genuine repentance will lead to mercy, pardon, and restoration.
- When God convicts of sin, that is the time to repent. Do not presume upon grace by delaying.

## THE SIGNS OF JUDGMENTS

Scripture records numerous examples of judgments God exercised upon the lost or His people. I've listed 3 categories and accompanying signs:

1. Lack of power among God's people. Jesus taught that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church. Gates are defensive in nature. Jesus was not teaching that Christians wouldn't be overcome by Satan, but rather that Satan couldn't stand against them. Thus the early church with no buildings, trained ministers, seminaries, honor, political power, or other natural advantages, turned the Roman Empire upside down. Therefore, the following signs are evidence of judgment:

- a. Inability of the church to make life changing impact among the majority of those who claim to be adherents – The Barna statistics of church attitudes and behaviors reveal no significant difference in most categories between those claiming to be Christians and the world. If the power of Christ were present, how could that be?
- b. Defeat by our enemies in every moral arena that we have fought the last few decades (fornication, homosexuality, abortion, etc) – Was there ever a time in the Bible when God's people continued in sin over a prolonged period of time, after many opportunities to repent, that

He did not fail to turn them over to their enemies? In America the majority claim to be Christian. Is it not odd that a minority backed only by the power of the devil is defeating a supposed majority backed by the power of God? That ought to be a clue.

c. Spiritual ineptness of the church to influence society even though society has a receptivity to spiritual things. Our society has written us off as irrelevant and is proactively removing Christian influences they once embraced.

d. Prayer movement with no change – When we don't listen to God, He eventually will not listen to us (Ps. 66:18).

e. Loss of making dynamic converts, many being unconverted, or having signed up on a church roll but unable to be found – I will apply this to my denomination, which even fares better than most. Toward the end of the 19th century it took about 15 members to lead one person to Christ; in the 1950's it took approximately 20; today it takes over 40. Of those on our rolls only half attend church regularly. Where's the power?

f. Being turned over to sin. In normal Christianity the Holy Spirit increasingly frees us from sinful patterns, resulting in greater Christlikeness and freedom. When our heart ceases responding to God, however, eventually He begins turning us over to sin's dominion once again (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28). A proliferation of sin in the church over time is evidence of God giving us up to our choices.

g. Loss of favor or honor with our society – favor always comes from God (Gen. 39:21, Dan. 1:9). When it is lost, that often is a judgment of God removing it because we have not been faithful to use it for His purposes. Long gone are the days of Bible and prayer in schools, teachings regarding Christian influence in the founding and guiding of our nation, and the public arena affirming God, Christmas, or anything else.

2. Removal of wisdom – If you select any ten judgments of God at random from Scripture, you will find they vary because the sins people committed varied. However, I found one judgment that remained universally true in a person's or nation's life that had been sinning over a prolonged period of time – the removal of wisdom. The reason this judgment proved universal was because just as they did not think the knowledge of God as worthy of being retained in their minds, God judged their minds no longer worthy of retaining the knowledge of Him. (Rom. 1:28).

a. Whenever anyone loses spiritual wisdom that they once had, they are under the judgment of God. They do not even need to pray for discernment whether or not they might be in trouble. (Ex. 7:3; Jos. 11:20; 1 Sam. 2:25; 2 Sam. 17:14; 2 Chr. 18:21-22; 2 Th. 2:10-11). These examples led to death because they had sinned to the point of no return, but any degree of wisdom loss is also a judgment of God).

b. When God is moving toward destroying a nation, He removes wisdom from its leaders – (Job 12:20-24). Does that not make you fear for our country?

c. However, if one recognizes the removal of wisdom, that is an invitation to repentance. When God was done with someone, He gave them no ability to recognize their sin. If God convicts, it is not too late.

### 3. Other signs of judgment

- a. Societal breakdown of the family (Rom. 1:30).
- b. Societal and relational conflict (Is. 3:5; Zec. 8:10; Rom. 1:28-30).
- c. Bad leadership (Job 34:29-30; Pr. 28:2).
- d. Being turned over to statutes that are not good (Eze. 20:24-25).
- e. Loss of finances (Hag. 1:6-11).
- f. Natural disasters (2 Chr. 7:13, Am. 3:6, 4:7, 9-11).
- g. The number of failures, setbacks, and reverses begin to increase over time (Hag. 1:5-11).
- h. Our success is unfulfilling (Mic. 6:14).
- i. Being turned over to our enemies (Lev. 26:17, Jdg. 2:14).

Any time something bad happens, that does not necessarily indicate judgment. When numerous examples or patterns occur, however, that ought to create godly fear. All of these signs of judgment and more are prevalent in our society today. It's not that God is going to judge us – He already is. In light of how our nation has been despising God, would it not be an odd thing if the sexual revolution of the 60's, family breakdown, 9/11, and hurricane Katrina were not all examples of the Lord seeking to arrest our attention?

The Bottom Line:

- The proliferation and increasing severity of the signs listed in this section indicate that we are under the judgment of God.

### HOW GOD INTENDS TO USE HIS PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF MERCY DURING JUDGMENT

God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked; therefore, the moment He begins the process of judgment, He simultaneously puts in place the possibility of mercy (Hab. 3:2). God expresses mercy in three ways: first, restoration of fellowship with God for Christians; second, conversion for the lost; third, grace to heal the land of its brokenness incurred by sin and judgment. God's primary means of delivering mercy to a nation is to place a revived people in the middle of it. With His people rightly related to Him, they lead many to Christ, engender hope, and guide people in being healed. Historically there has always been a great harvest of souls when God's people returned to Him, and social ministries explode.

The Bottom Line:

- Wrath and mercy walk hand in hand at times of judgment.
- God's provision for mercy is to place a revived people in the midst of the nation. They are to help people turn to the Lord, then guide them in being healed, such as fixing broken homes, freedom from addictions, deliverance from abuse, etc.

## FOUR EXPECTATIONS IN THE COMING DAYS

I have four expectations of the coming days as they relate to our nation: 1. God will create a catalytic moment of opportunity for national repentance. In Scripture and history God often has done something to arrest the attention of an entire nation, such as Elijah on Mt. Carmel, or the appearance of John the Baptist in the wilderness. When God creates that moment, like 9/11, it is the opportunity for Christians to spiritually interpret what it means so that the nation will awaken and turn to the Lord. On 9/11 the majority of Christian leaders failed to interpret that as judgment; therefore, our churches filled temporarily then returned to business as usual. Most voices that did speak either communicated that a loving God would never do something like that, or they singled out the sins of a certain group of people as the problem. What should have been declared is that we are under the judgment of God, beginning with Christians first, then the nation. We should have seized that catalytic moment to urge hope that genuine repentance would lead to mercy and pardon. As Christians, we must be ready for that moment when God creates another opportunity for repentance by seizing national attention.

2. Forgiveness of sin has never meant the automatic cancellation of temporal judgment. For example, when David repented he was completely forgiven, but his infant still died, the sword came to his house, and 20,000 people perished. When Rehoboam turned to the Lord, he still had to serve Shishak (2 Chr. 12:7-8). To be sure repentance reduced much of their judgment, but God still required accountability because He must hallow His name. Man cannot mock God by not reaping what he sows (Gal. 6:7). In the case of David, even though God did not put him to death as the law demanded, when his judgment was completed everyone in Israel had learned to fear the holiness of “this glorious and awesome name” (Deu. 28:58). Therefore even if revival comes it is doubtful that we can escape the backlog of God’s judgment for the immediate future. Should God ignore the way we have allowed our so called converts to bear His name in such a grossly immoral way to a watching world? Worse yet, what about the proliferation of ministers who have publicly fallen, thereby bringing shame to His name? Can He ignore the financial idols of our heart? Regarding our nation, can He look the other way while we despise Him and vindicate the immoral man? Can He turn a blind eye to the fact that we produce the vast majority of the world’s pornography? Should He act as if the blood of millions of abortions were as nothing?

3. God’s grace takes on the expression of allowing us to navigate the judgment of God. When judgment cannot be cancelled, His grace makes provision for us to go through it as the process unfolds. This statement implies five truths. First, judgment may not always be a one-time event, but a season over time that one must walk through. Second, the continued judgment of God in no way implies the removal of His favor or grace. Third, as one goes through the judgment, grace takes on the form of providing a person with everything needed to endure it until God hallows His name. Fourth, as we navigate judgment, we should do so with confidence that God will help us. Fifth, temporal judgment does not last forever; there will be an end to it. David’s life reflects these truths. His judgment for adultery and murder required at least 11 years for God to hallow His name. Grace did not cancel his judgment, but rather made provision for him to go through it. When David’s son, Absalom, chased him from the throne, he cried out to God for help in defeating the counsel of Ahithophel, Absalom’s best advisor. Think of it! The God who decreed the judgment was the same God who gave David grace in the midst of it! The continued judgment after repentance in no way implied God’s heart had turned from him. Because David humbly submitted to and navigated the process correctly, God restored the throne to him. At the

end of the Absalom ordeal, the judgment of God was complete. In light of our sin as Christians and the nation, I believe it is too late to cancel our judgment, but it is not too late to navigate it and live if we repent.

4. The outcome of successfully navigating the judgment of God will produce blessing. When we go through judgment humbly, God eventually removes the shame of our sin, hallows His name, restores the years the locusts have eaten, and turns our curse into a blessing. The Civil War is an example of our nation submitting to God's judgment, turning to Him in the midst of it, and coming out the other side stronger. God more than answered their cry "with blessings, no less than the restoration of our now divided and suffering country."

The Bottom Line for this section:

- God will do something in the coming days to create a catalytic moment of opportunity for the nation to awaken and turn to Him. We must be ready.
- Even if we repent, it is doubtful that judgment can be cancelled.
- We can, however, navigate the judgment of God and come out the other side restored and whole.
- During the season of judgment we should not faint. We should have confidence, like David, that the Lord's heart is toward us, and that He will make provision to help us.
- At the end of the process God will turn that season of judgment into a blessing greater than what was lost due to judgment.

## SUMMARY

Revival for God's people and awakening for our nation are possible. In order for that to happen, we must teach the fear of God before we will recognize judgment and return. Christians must first repent and be revived before the nation as a whole can be turned. In light of the severity of our sin, our expectations should be that it is too late to escape judgment; however, if we repent we should be unafraid because we know that God's favor will be upon us to navigate it and come out the other side restored. The course of action we should currently be taking as Christians to prepare ourselves for the coming judgment, is to teach God's people two things in particular:

1. The fear of the Lord.
2. How to practically walk with God daily in consistent fellowship.

All this being done in sincerity and truth, let us arise with renewed hope, let us move forward in humble expectation, let us stand in the midst of this moment with unflappable courage, knowing the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in mercy, not willing that any should perish. Let our prayers wing their flights to Him on the winds of contrition and sorrow, all in the assured hope that the inclination of His heart will not ignore the cry of His people. Let our eyes look to Him as the eyes of a maiden to her mistress. Who knows? Perhaps the Lord will turn and leave behind a blessing.

If you wish to contact John concerning this article, order resources on prayer and awakening from him, or schedule him for a conference, you may do so at [john@johnfranklinministries.org](mailto:john@johnfranklinministries.org).