
Subject: FINAL CHAPTER: The 'Out-of-Church' Christians.

Dear Saints

Below please find Chapter 10, the FINAL CHAPTER of Andrew Strom's book: The 'Out-of-Church' Christians. Please visit his web-site at <http://www.streetrevival.com/>. His e-mail is prophetic@revivalschool.com. You can also subscribe to their newsletter by sending an empty e-mail to anzac-subscribe@welovegod.org.

Enjoy!

Eben Swart

CHAPTER TEN IS "REVIVAL" THE ANSWER?

A "Revival" in the Christian sense is defined as a powerful move of God to bring true 'restoration' and renewal - to return the church to something like its original 'Book of Acts' state - at least for awhile. There have been a number of powerful Reformations and Revivals down through church history - some of which utterly transformed the church forever.

With the realization that thousands of people are leaving today's churches, many leaders want some kind of "answer" that will bring them back again. "What can we do to bring them back?" they ask. But they do not realize that many of these Out-of-church people are not interested in returning to "church as we know it". They are waiting for a new move - an entirely new 'Church' - something transformed by the power of God. In fact, it is clear that they want something far closer to the original church of the Bible. What they are talking about is large-scale Reformation and Revival. -Something that will take us back to the full vitality, the faith and the power of the early Christians.

Now, one interesting thing about the original church in Jerusalem is that it was essentially an "outdoor" church. "Excuse me?" you say. "An outdoor church? I thought they met every day in the temple. That does not sound like an outdoor church to me."

Though few Christians today are made aware of this, it is absolutely beyond question that the Jerusalem church was based out-of-doors.

The Book of Acts records that the Jerusalem believers met every day in a place called Solomon's Porch, which was in a giant open-air courtyard attached to the main Temple. This courtyard was known as "The Court of the Gentiles", and it was a huge, open, paved area - about the size of five-and-a-half football fields. Along one side ran the narrow covered area where the apostles would stand and preach - known as Solomon's Porch.

We know that the Jerusalem church numbered in the thousands right from the beginning, so if they wanted to gather together "as one" then the only place to do it was in a huge open area. Also, this was the most busy and crowded 'square' in the whole city. So if they wanted to get their message in front of the largest-possible audience, then this was the place to do it.

Now what does all this have to do with our discussion of the "Out-of-church" Christians? Well, they are not the only ones who have been talking about getting back to the "original". They are not the only ones who believe a great Reformation and Revival are coming. This is something that God seems to have been speaking to Christians of all kinds - right across the spectrum - for a number of years now. He seems to want Revival more than anything.

Could it be that such a move of God may be the "meeting point" where a lot of In-church and Out-of-church people find common ground? Could this be the answer?

What is clear is that God wants His "original" church back. All the miracles, the unity, the piercing 'repentance' preaching, and everything else that made the early church what she was - this is clearly what He wants to restore. Because so much has been lost over the centuries. Our comparative impact today is minimal. And our petty divisions and denominations are killing us.

I think a lot of Christians would be surprised to learn how totally different the original was from that which we call "church" today.

For one thing, in those days they had a completely UNITED church. (-And I am not talking about 'ecumenism' here!) The simple truth is, there were no 'denominations' at all. In fact, they would have been shocked even to hear of such a thing! This was "one" church - with no divisions, and no little groups separating themselves off and calling themselves by different 'labels'. After all, Jesus Himself had prayed, "That they all may be ONE... that the world may BELIEVE." Why is it that the world does not "believe" us today? Perhaps it is because we are not "one".

A lot of people lately have been emphasising the fact that the early church met in houses (-which is certainly true). But they seem to forget that the Jerusalem believers also gathered together in HUGE OPEN-AIR GATHERINGS. And this happened almost EVERY DAY - coming together "as one". All the believers from the entire city could gather together in this way.

Thus we can see that they had TWO different kinds of meetings in the Jerusalem church. One was the more intimate 'house-church' type meeting, where the believers from a local neighborhood would all gather together in someone's house - taking communion and flowing together in spiritual gifts - building each other up in unity and love. That was one kind of meeting. But the other kind was the huge outdoor type that we have been discussing. (-A massive city-wide gathering where the apostles would preach and heal the sick, etc). These too happened all the time.

What the apostles were really doing here was continuing the ministry of Jesus - just as they had been commanded. Both Jesus and John-the-Baptist had a ministry that was largely in the open-air - out where the "common people" were. This was very important. They were called to reach the lost, not to hide themselves away behind four walls.

We in the church are doing the whole world a great disservice today. They almost never see us gathered together "as one", do they? In fact they hardly ever see us at all. We lock ourselves away in our separate little groups - behind four walls - out of sight and out of mind. No wonder we have so little impact on the world around us any more. We are absenting ourselves from their lives.

But all of that is about to change. God has been speaking right around the globe in recent years about a coming "Great Reformation" of the church - a great "shaking" that will return her to the way she was always meant to be.

It is interesting to note that many of the church's greatest Revivals and Awakenings down the centuries have involved a return to huge open-air gatherings. The Great Awakening of the 1740's (under Wesley, Whitefield and Tennant) was a prime example of this. It became commonplace for tens of thousands of people to

gather in the open air. Likewise the 'Second Great Awakening' of the 1800's (beginning in Kentucky) which saw the origin of the 'camp-meeting', and had thousands gathering in open fields. Even the great 1859 Revival saw strong elements of this - especially in Ulster with her massive open-air prayer meetings. I am convinced that God is about to move again in this way. He wants to restore the 'original' thing. He wants a church that gathers in "one accord" - right out where the people are. He wants "one" church - not many - a church that is pure and holy - "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing". And He wants a church that goes forth "destroying the works of the devil", just like Jesus did.

If God has to bring great "shaking" to see this kind of Christianity again, then that is what He will bring. Whatever it takes. We are entering an era of great "change" in the church. In fact, I believe we are almost at the point of 'change or perish' in Western Christianity today. For God cannot live with a lukewarm church.

So where do the "Out-of-church" Christians fit into all this? Well, a large number of them believe that what they are going through right now is 'preparation' for this coming move of God. It really is significant how many of them wrote to me about this. They believe that in order to be fully prepared for what God is about to do, they need to 'unlearn' many of their old ways of "doing church" and prepare for the fact that God is about to do a whole new thing.

Here is a sampling of what they wrote on this subject:

From: Rowayne (-South Africa):

I believe that God is busy with something totally different that will shake religion and tradition off the books. The time is coming that we will see a huge shift in the way church has been orchestrated. I believe church is going to the streets. Worship will absolutely combust onto the streetcorners and plains. Prayer will ascend from shopping malls and business venues. You will not have to go to church because church will be waiting for you outside!

The awesome transformation of a weak, powerless organisation into a potent Warrior Bride... Some of us have seen this wonderful shift in the heart of God many times and we are waiting and watching and it's not going to be much longer. Praise God!

From: Lea (-USA):

I feel that the traditional way of "doing church" has had its era. I think that God is seeking out people who are willing to admit that we are starving and are not getting fed in the church today even though I hear pastors tell me that we are. I truly believe that we cannot be ready for the next move of God until we acknowledge that we are hungry and that the current structure is not working. I am waiting to see what God does and I think it will be outside of walls and especially outside of special programs and traditional Sunday morning agendas. And I look forward to the time when we as believers can unite under one umbrella and be privileged to be part of the next move that God is doing.

I don't think that everyone is called to leave the church but I do believe that some are and I am encouraged to hear that these people are responding. I'm excited to see what God is going to do with these people!

From: Sue (-Australia):

In 1995 the Lord showed me that he was going to "shake the hell out of the church." Literally. He showed me that within the local church system there are demonic strongmen over some Churches and they have the legal right to be there. He gave me Scriptures that "everything that can be shaken will be shaken." Any structure that is not established by the Lord will crumble and fall, eg. institutions, churches, colleges - anything that was not founded on the Rock Christ Jesus. The established system as we knew it was going to crumble. What had happened was that man had gotten in the way of God and his plan for his Kingdom. I am one of those waiting. I know that God will again use the men and women he has trained up and are outside the system. That what God has birthed into their lives will not be in vain. I felt I was hidden in the Cave of Adullam for 5 years. Last year at a prophetic conference I attended, I discovered others felt the same way.... Jesus is coming back for a glorious church.

From: Steven (-Location unknown):

We have been outside for over three years, waiting for God to show us what to do next. This week I recieved a letter asking me to come teach pastoral leadership to a Bible School in the South Pacific. But what would I teach? My concept is totally changed from the "NORMAL" pastoral view. Is the Church ever going to be ready for the rooting out, tearing down, of the normal powerless system that causes the people to depend upon the church and the leaders instead of on God and Him ALONE?

From: Jim (-Location unknown):

I jokingly call this an "Out of the Body experience" referring to the body of Christ. What it may turn out to be is an awakening that reveals the Church without walls.

From: Cathy (-USA):

We have recently moved... there are 3 prominent Spirit-filled churches with the same doctrine for the most part. Yet, these three churches never mention the other or come together in unity for the area. They are all growing, as far as we can tell, and they all have nice buildings and programs to draw in as many people as possible... I can't help but wonder if, like in Transformations of Columbia, the leadership would come together... I heard one of the pastors from Columbia say: "The people were ready for unity, but the pastors were holding them back." It may not be the whole answer, but in my spirit I believe it could be a key step.

From: L.S. (-USA):

I feel like I've been waiting a long time.... but I believe He is saying the Reformation is coming soon, and I will find a place in the new move of God.

From: Carroll (-USA):

We have heard and continue to hear prophecies about the change that is coming in the church. Only we are hearing in part. Most of them do not realize that God is not moving us from one type of brick and mortar church to another, but to something outside the walls of the church as well.

We are not against church - but God wants to make some changes and we want to be with Him when He makes them.

Many people like ourselves who are unchurched are not alone - we are not lone rangers. The friends we have are not wandering around without direction. We are a part of the "Body" and the next big move of God will come in the marketplace and homes and it may well be that the ones "who miss out" could be inside the brick and mortar system. Because they are taught that everything must come from the system. They will have a hard time with the new move of God.

From: Mark (-USA):

I feel in my heart that this mass of hungry and Christ-following people is God's own way of setting the stage for a huge reformational change.

The author again:

As you can see, this sense of a coming Reformation or Revival is very prevalent amongst a lot of Out-of-church people. They see themselves as being in the 'wilderness' and headed for a Promised Land of Revival - a "new wineskin" for the church. But as I said earlier in this book, just like the children of Israel, the test will come when it is time to finally exit this wilderness.

I am convinced that many Out-of-church people certainly are "leadership" material, and it would not surprise me at all if God was preparing them for a leadership role in this coming move. But there is one thing they need to come to grips with. -All of the greatest Revivals had strong leaders. This was totally crucial to their success. But can these Out-of-church people truly cope with this concept? I cannot help feeling that some (maybe many) could fall victim to the anti-leader, anti-authority, anti-Body attitudes that they have imbibed in the 'Out-of-church' scene. (-Just like I did). A lot of them really don't believe in "LEADERSHIP" any more.

And if you do not believe in any but the mildest form of authority then it is very difficult to truly LEAD yourself. You may 'manage', but actual LEADING is a different matter. And without leaders who will use their authority to keep the devil out, any Revival will be infiltrated by the enemy in no time flat. I have seen this again and again as I have studied past Revivals. This is the main reason why the great Welsh Revival of 1904 finished after JUST ONE YEAR. We have an enemy who prowls around like a roaring lion and he hates Revivals. He has infiltrated and ruined many moves of God down through history, and if we give him the chance he will do it again. He loves to move into situations where there is a 'vacuum' of authority and no-one guarding the gates. I tell you, there is no such thing as a "leaderless" Revival. Or if there is, it does not last for long! Revivals must be guarded by leaders who are appointed to that place by God, and who are not afraid to stand up and be counted when the time comes. Such were Wesley, Booth, Finney and the like. Strong leaders - all of them. And such were the apostles also. Revival and strong leadership go hand in hand.

The book of Acts is full of leaders who ACTED LIKE LEADERS. They were servants - yes. But they were also REAL LEADERS. Without them there would have been no Book of Acts. I wonder how long it will be before some Out-of-church people come to grips with this simple fact? (-It took me a very long time).

So I have to ask these questions: Are today's Out-of-church people truly ready to help LEAD a new move of God? Or are many of them actually afraid to "lead"? Are they ready to assume responsibility and authority where required? Or do they believe in a kind of "leaderless" Revival? Are they ready to become "joiners" in the true sense of the word? Or is suspicion and 'standoffishness' now a large part of their make-up? Are they actually ready to be knit into a Body? Or will they eventually find some excuse to remain distant and detached? These are all crucial questions. And they are the very things that will be tested when the time comes. Have these people truly RENOUNCED all the things that they need to renounce?

REPENTANCE TO SWEEP THE CHURCH

It is obvious that even though there are many issues of "structure" that need to be dealt with today, the REAL issues (-the ones that really matter) are issues of the HEART. The church is sick and ailing because her heart is sick and ailing. It is not so much a matter of the "boxes" that she lives in or the style of meetings that she has. These are secondary factors. It is the HEARTS of God's people that really need work. And that is what any true Revival must do first - cleanse and purify the hearts of His people. Fixing the 'structural' things can come later. The heart is what really matters. And thus a great wave of REPENTANCE must come first. (-Just like every true Revival down through history).

I know a number of people in the house-church movement who believe that if we can just get the right house-based structure, then everything else will follow. Some spend hours discussing 'plurality of elders' and house-church formats, etc. They seem to believe that if they can change the "boxes", then everything else will come right. I am sorry, but I have to disagree. A change of HEART is what is needed - primarily and above all. And it is Revival that will bring this about. Remember, in the early church it was the OUTPOURING at Pentecost that came first - and then the new structures were built around that. Revival must first come and transform the hearts of God's people before anything else. To try and form a 'new wineskin' without the new wine is simply putting the cart before the horse.

Like many people, I am convinced that a great Revival is coming - a flood of God's Spirit that will bring the church to her knees in deep repentance and transformation. And through this there will come a 'new wineskin' and an enormous harvest - with many new leaders raised up by God.

So will many of today's Out-of-church people be amongst this new leadership? I have no doubt that they will. God did not put them through all this training for nothing. But timing is the key. Sometimes it takes a "crisis" for new leadership to be allowed to arise. "Cometh the hour, cometh the man" as the saying goes. And it is never more true than in times of Reformation or Revival. Suddenly the new leaders arrive, as if from nowhere - prepared for years in the secret place by God. So it has always been with the greatest Revivals. Timing is all.

As we have seen in this chapter - in fact this whole book - there are a group of Christians in the world today who have left the comfort of routines and friends and familiar surroundings, to set off towards something new, not knowing exactly where they are going or how they will get there. Just knowing that they had to go. They heard a call, they tasted a vision, and off they went. It was a brave thing to do and a lot of them have my deepest admiration. If they can make it through the desert, nothing is surer than that many of them will make wonderful leaders of God's people. But it is getting out of that 'wilderness' mindset that is the key thing. I personally believe that a great number of them will make it through. We are living in momentous days.

So is this huge Out-of-church movement a sign that something unprecedented lies just ahead? Is the massive groundswell of "dissatisfaction" amongst multitudes of Christians evidence that dramatic change is just around the corner? Certainly we would have to conclude that something major is going on. This thing is way too big to be mere coincidence. There is something very unusual taking place - on a worldwide scale that only God could orchestrate.

So are we about to see a new breed of leaders come in from the desert - prepared for years for this time - ready to usher in a new move of God's Spirit? Is another great 'Street-Revival' approaching? Well, one thing is certain:- We desperately need one. Only time will tell. But the signs are there that something of this order of magnitude is definitely building. It seems beyond question that God is on the move in a new way in this generation. And He is doing something quite radical. Or perhaps it is something so old that it just seems radical - because we have never seen its like before.