



## Scriptures and Doctrine :: A challenge to the Churches... Vance Havner

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A Challenge To The Churches

By Vance Havner

It would be a high day for our churches if somehow they could be persuaded to stop whatever they are doing long enough to hear our Lord's last message to them. Again and again He repeated His exhortation: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. 3:13).

But we are so busy with our own enterprises that we do not hear His voice. We are trying to operate on a "business as usual" basis when neither business nor anything else is as usual — nor will anything ever be as usual again. It is an hour of sheer desperation for America, for the world, for the cause of the Gospel!

The hour is too late for much of what we are trying to do in the religious world. We are trying to meet a short-term emergency with a long-range program. We advertise "Services As Usual" — which may be what is the matter with them!

There ought to be an urgency befitting the emergency and the saints ought to be as desperate as the situation.

The Peril We Face

Would you not think that in this hour of mortal peril the churches would be filled with penitent worshippers — praying even all night while yet there is time?

Why are the saints so anxious to get their sleep while sinners revel all night... and church members stay up feasting their eyes on Sodom and Gomorrah brought by television into the living room? Have we been numbed and stupefied by summit conferences and peaceful coexistence and religious optimists saying "Peace and safety" while our destruction draws nigh?

The average New Year's Eve observance in most churches is a pitiful commentary on how lightly we regard the frightening times. A movie, games, a snack, anything to pass away the time, and then at a quarter-to-twelve a little devotional.

God Forgive Us

God has said, "If My people...then I will...." But who wants to humble himself, pray, seek God's face and turn from his wicked ways? (2 Chron. 7:14). We are in no mood for that. We cannot have that kind of prayer meeting with congregations that would rather play than pray!

All-night prayer meetings can be staged like marathons, but what kind of Christians are we — that we do not voluntarily gather in intercession that continues until we break through to God?

What would happen if our great church conventions would just once throw their printed programs aside and go to their knees in desperate prayer? If it be argued that such convocations are gathered for business, we ask, what greater business do we have than to seek a visitation of God?

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Mind you, "unto the churches." The church is the body, the building, the bride of Christ, but here local churches are in mind. A lot of preaching about the church as an abstraction never gets around to the church on the corner. The ideal becomes the enemy of the actual. There is no such thing as revival in general apart from the local church.

The man best qualified to judge whether or not we are having revival today is the pastor, for any revival worth talking about will show up in the local church. It is the thermometer of the spiritual climate anywhere.

There are some who think God is bypassing the churches, in too big a hurry to plod along with local assemblies, and that He is using other movements to get the job done more quickly.

God does sometimes use the irregular, but only to feed back into the regular. The local fellowship is the unit our Lord left to carry on His work and at the very last chapter of the church age He is still speaking to visible congregations in definite places. God's program will never by-pass the local church.

#### Grieving the Spirit

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." We are listening to everything and everyone except the Holy Spirit. We decide what kind of service, what kind of revival we want, and then we are disappointed if we do not have it!

We need to let God give us His pattern from the holy mount. We write the score and expect the Holy Spirit to play it. We plot the course and expect Him to follow it. We expect the Almighty to sign on our little dotted line.

God is not signing on anybody's little dotted line. Are we so in love with our plans that we are unwilling to bow to His? Are we willing to throw them into the wastebasket if He offers a better one? Have we ever bowed to the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit?

Do we lie to Him, quench and grieve Him? Do we regard our bodies as His temple? Have we ever been Spirit-filled or would we rather miss a blessing than give up a prejudice?

"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." The churches! The Spirit! The listener! Eight times in the Gospels, our Lord says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Eight times in Revelation He says, "He that hath an ear, let him hear." To the Laodiceans He said, "If anyone hear My voice, and open the door..." (Rev. 3:20).

#### The Lord Is Waiting

Observe the breadth of it: "If anyone...." Observe the narrowness of it: "If anyone hear My voice and open the door." It is broad enough to include everybody in the church but it is limited in its fulfillment to those who hear His voice and open the door!

Anyone can start a revival, but few ever do! Our Lord is waiting for someone, anyone, inside the church with an ear for God!

Alas, we have ears but "hearing we hear not." We spend a lot of time these days studying how to talk when we need most to learn how to listen! After all, the Lord gave us two ears to hear with and only one mouth to talk with, for which let us be thankful!

What is the Spirit saying to the churches? "Repent!" But some churches are too big to repent. Others are too busy. And others are too good, they have need of nothing (Rev. 3:14-19).

They say: "Let sin be undisturbed. Do not roll away the stone from Lazarus' grave lest an unpleasant situation arise. Do not disturb the status quo. Let well enough alone. Let Achan keep his wedge of gold. Let the immoral brother in Corinth alone. Let Jezebel set up her altar to Baal in Thyatira!"

Others grow discouraged and say that it is no use trying to bring churches to repentance. Our Lord did not feel that way. Five of the Asian churches were in a lamentable condition but the Christ of the candlesticks patiently endeavored to arouse them (Revelation, chapters 2 and 3).

#### There Are Encouraging Signs

For over twenty years I have been going up and down the land from church to church, calling the saints to repentance. I do not believe in standing outside the local churches and knocking on them, I believe in standing within the churches exhorting them.

There are more open doors now than ever, and I think it indicates that ministers and members of our churches are be

coming aware that, for all of our increasing membership and activity, something is seriously wrong within our fellowships

We are doing everything but the first thing: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." We have the churches. The Spirit is among us. Who will be the listener, hear His voice and open the door? (Rev. 3:20-22).