

Social Graces, or Revival? Getting REAL to Get REVIVAL

By Kimberly Sowell

*I grew up in the world of paper plates and napkins. We had social graces, sure, but I never knew how unrefined I was until I grew older and was introduced to some of the finest southern belles of yesteryear. Nothing thrills me more than finding a bargain, but now I know it's uncouth to reveal such details to a friend—let her think you paid a fortune! And of course, it's acceptable to serve a store-bought dessert when you get in a pinch, but you must present that dessert on a proper dessert platter and hide the evidence of the store wrapping, never to reveal such sweet little secrets to the guests! And it's nothing short of vulgar to discuss such matters as personal illness and family "difficulties" - these are matters to remain within the family circle. **Oh, really?** The lengths we go to conceal our dirty laundry...but at what spiritual cost? In James 5:13-16, James instructs on how the people of God are to interact with one another. He begins with prayer for the sick. We live in a society that promotes self-sufficiency, taking care of yourself, not showing weakness by asking for help, but James instructs the sick to contact the elders of the church for prayer and anointing. That's putting those elders out, isn't it, asking them to come all the way over to your house to minister to you personally? And now they've seen you at your worst, at your weakest, wearing bedclothes and hair sticking out everywhere! They even may feel compelled to go further to help you with cleaning or by bringing a meal.*

Do you have difficulty allowing others to help you when you are weak? Ask yourself, is it because of the sin of pride? Not only does accepting the prayer and help of others allow you to rest and heal, but it also provides an outlet for others to enjoy the great pleasure of serving. Relationships are strengthened among Christian friends, and joy flows down from the Father.

Next James instructs Christians to confess their sins to one another. What?! Talk about asking for trouble! Or so we imagine. Unfortunately, many Christians are not trustworthy to hear our private confessions of weakness and struggles without spreading the bad news to others, and we all must resolve NOT to be such a friend. But when we follow God's principle to confess our sins to one another, when we get REAL with one another, we can get to the spiritual root of our problems. Keeping up an appearance that we have it all together is hard work, and of little use, because truly we realize no one is immune to the trials and temptations of this world. Often we are willing to share our struggles with close friends, but the conversation may not go as deeply as needed; sharing trials can be more profitable than having a gripe session. It's often in our trials God is working in us to root out sins of fear, doubt, anger, judgmentalness, and selfishness. If we willingly discuss our failures with our friends, they can pray with us that our sins may be forgiven and Christ be glorified in every situation.

"What we need in the church today is revival." Have you heard these words, or said them yourself? We agree with a hearty "amen" when we hear talk of revival, but what are we willing to do about it? A spirit of revival comes from the Lord as He breaks our hearts over our own personal sins and our own need for godliness, and it spreads like a raging flame through the hearts of others in our fellowship. Confession and repentance of sin is a necessary element for revival (2 Chron. 7:14), and it is the act of the humble, not of those seeking to maintain appearances.

Getting REAL with one another—confessing our sins, and seeking support and prayer from our Christian friends...taking off the masks...getting serious about holiness before God...it's a matter of choice: do we follow society's rules, or the instruction of the Lord? Do we want social graces, or revival?

*****Though Scripture needs no authentication, history has shown God's formula for revival to be true, even in recent days:**

Wheaton College Revival of 1950: "Students and faculty confessed sins, righted wrongs, and experienced spiritual renewal in a meeting that lasted from about seven o'clock Wednesday evening until Friday morning."

Asbury College Revival of 1970: "For 185 hours students and others confessed sins, testified, prayed, and sang."

Howard Payne University Revival of 1995: "It continued until 6:00 AM Monday with confessions of pride, hatred, immorality, cheating, theft, addictions, and other sins."

(From *Christianity through the Centuries*, Earle E. Cairns, 1996, Zondervan)