



IBFNA

February 2021

Volume 29, Number 3

THE REVIEW

Being a Fundamentalist in a Post-Christian Culture

By Pastor Mark Strangman, Moderator IBFNA

Recently, I saw an interesting quote which caused me to ponder its message. It was meant to be “tongue-in-cheek,” but after thinking about it, I realized that it really said quite a lot. The quote was, “I would like to say 'no thank you' to 2021. I've experienced the twelve-month free trial, and I'd just as soon pass.” This was a Facebook post that was meant for laughs, but there is great truth behind this glib statement. People are reeling from the experiences of the past year and quite leery of what lies ahead. From mistrust in the government, to uncertainty about the economy, to fear of the Covid-19 virus, people all around us are terrified of tomorrow.

Even fundamental Christians, who should have their hope and trust securely fastened to the Lord, are nervous about the immediate future. With the presidential election finally having ended and the federal government seemingly leaning toward a radically liberal political position, the freedoms we always have enjoyed now appear to be in jeopardy. This is especially true for the freedom to practice biblical Christianity and to live as a Fundamentalist. How do we respond to what is occurring in our country? Should we fear what man might do to us if we stay the course for the Lord and continue to preach the gospel without apology or reservation? Has our country changed so much that we must adapt and compromise in order not to be put in harm's way?

Preposterous! We are children of the Lord and joint heirs with Jesus Christ! Our citizenship is first and foremost in heaven, hidden with Christ who is seated at the righthand of the throne of God the Father. As Fundamentalists, we hold to the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, that Scripture alone dictates our lives and that we must follow it no matter the cost. America was founded on biblical truths. However, we are now seeing a definite shift in the culture of our country. In view of that shift away from that which we hold so sacred and dear, some might suggest that the answer is to rise up and to oppose those who would seek to prevent our living for the Lord and serving Him. Is it right and biblical to arise in rebellion against those who would seek to silence the truth of the Word of God and usher in a society of humanism and unrighteousness?

A term that is being used recently in evangelical Christianity is “post-Christian culture.” This happens when a society, once founded on biblical values, departs from its roots. Most of its citizens no longer think and live according to biblical truth. America's post-Christian culture seems to be the next challenge for our modern-day fundamental church. Fundamentalism has always stayed the course and stood for the truth of God's Word. We stood firm against modernism after World War I for the majority of the twentieth century. We stood firm against post-modernism, with its elevation of experience over



INSIDE PAGES

5

DR. HARRIS

6

ELECTION 2020

7

2021
CONFERENCE

Membership &
Subscription:
IBFNA

521 E. Godfrey
Ave.
Philadelphia, PA
19120-2123

(475) 329-0585
www.ibfna.org

truth and its emphasis of mega-church, seeker-sensitive, man-centered ministry philosophies. Through these and many other challenges to true Christianity, we have continually declared that the Word of God is sufficient and that we will not depart from it.

But these are uncharted waters for all of us in today's church in America. We have not dealt with large-scale persecution as many of our brothers and sisters have experienced in other countries. We have greatly benefited from the biblical roots of our homeland. We have not been faced with the prospect of actual martyrdom. Still, the future is unclear for us as we look ahead. Our country is rapidly spiraling downward. Our first amendment protection for religious freedom is terminally ill.

What are we to do? I would suggest to you that there are three options for us to consider, though, I must admit I do not believe the first two are biblically viable. The first would be to give in and capitulate to the government to continue to operate our churches. History has witnessed this many times. The church in Germany before World War II preached widespread compliance, not realizing what would result until it was too late to correct. Some tried to speak out but were silenced because their voices were too few and drowned out by the opposition.

The second choice is to rise up in rebellion against what some consider to be illegitimate, tyrannical rule. I am surprised by how many brethren I have talked to who have thought an uprising possible, citing our country's history and the American Revolutionary War. I must confess that I have wrestled with this possibility. As I pray and search God's Word, I wonder—would I be able to join such a cause for patriotism and freedom? I sincerely question—does Scripture supports such a solution, or are such means man-centered thinking, not truly trusting the Lord? Believers will come to different interpretations of God's Word and applications to current events. I only ask that you search the Scriptures with me as we seek to honor the Lord together.

The third option is what I believe to be the scriptural mandate which we must put into practice, perhaps more than ever before. We must search out Scripture as the Bereans did and come to a biblical conclusion. But before we consider what the Word of God says on this subject, let me share with you one personal observation. One of the problems that

unfortunately has occurred in our country, specifically in the conservative ranks, including sadly many Christians, is the elevation of a man higher than he should be. Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I consider President Donald Trump to have been a good president. I voted for him twice because he was standing for principles and policies that I believed to be consistent with Scripture and honoring to the Lord. He may have been the most anti-abortion president in history in opposition to a great scourge of our land, which under the new administration is once again fast becoming a celebrated evil. President Trump was a great proponent for the nation of Israel and our country's relationship to her.

But he was just a man, ordained by God to be our president. Many Christians have had their hope shattered by his losing the election, but as Christians we are never to fix our eyes on a man, save the Lord Jesus Christ. I wish President Trump well and genuinely wish he were still the president, but my hope is fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, our liberty is not dependent on any rule of law that man may enforce. Our liberty is in the Lord. He is the author and finisher of our faith and our freedom.

So, what does Scripture teach about citizenship and law? How are we to live biblically as Fundamentalists in the face of this post-Christian society? I am by no means seeking to impart some new, radical interpretation of Scripture, but rather to remind you of what you all know so well. I propose that there are four essential responsibilities to consider.

The Responsibility of Dual-Citizenship

We have been, as Paul stated to the church at Colossae, “translated into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col. 1:13). Phil. 3:20 states: “For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” The word translated here *conversation* is the Greek word *politeuma* meaning *community* or *citizenship*. The verse means that we believers must conduct ourselves as citizens of heaven, always looking for Christ to take us home.

But as the song says, “But until then, my heart will go on singing. Until then, with joy I'll carry on.” Paul tells us, in the verses leading up to his great teaching on our relationship to human government, that we are to conduct our lives reverently before the Lord and respectfully before all men. The key to practicing what is in chapter 13 of Romans is to be

living these verses before it: "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things; but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:14-18).

This is also the case in the verses leading up to Peter's instruction on government in 1 Peter 2. He states in verses 11-12: "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation." We are strangers and pilgrims, living in this country as expatriates on our way home to the Lord. It is clear in Scripture that we are to be model citizens, who are to attempt, in so far as it is possible, to live peaceably among all men by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Responsibility of Prayer

The same idea is continued by Paul in 1 Tim. 2:1-2: "I exhort therefore that, first-of-all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." Our being model citizens of this country begins with godliness and honesty. Our very life before the Lord dictates that we be our best before fellow-citizens of our earthly home. To be anything less would be to live contrary to God's Word.

But please note what is at the center of this life we live as Americans. We must pray for those who lead us. The priority in prayer is praying for all men. This undoubtedly would be for their salvation, but also for God's blessing on them. Next, Paul specifically singles out those who are in government positions. We must be praying for those who lead us in our earthly citizenship. Do we pray for our president, no matter who he is? What about the governor, senators, representatives, vice president and even the speaker of the House?

This prayer is not conditioned on whether we like them or agree with them. It is commanded by God because He has ordained them to be our leaders.

According to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, this responsibility of prayer extends to law enforcement, judges, and others in government positions. This is good and acceptable before the Lord (1 Tim. 2:3).

The Responsibility of Submission

Tit. 3:1 says: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work." This is now the crux of the issue. We are to be subject to governing authority and every ordinance of man. Peter tells us to do this "for the Lord's sake" and that this is His will for us. He states: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Pet. 2:13-17).

We submit because we are the Lord's servants, and the powers that govern us are ordained of God: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). The word consistently used for *submit* or *be subject* to is *hupotasso*. It means *to put under*. It is to submit oneself voluntarily to a position of accountability and authority. It is used several times in the biblical model for the church and marriage found in Eph. 5:21-24. The act of submission is done as a service to the Lord and is part of the authority structure God has appointed to bring order to our lives. You submit to the one who is accountable for you. In marriage, God holds the husband accountable for the family, so the wife willingly submits to his place before the Lord. The same principle is true for the citizen and his government.

The Responsibility of Relationship

As the government has been ordained by God to look after its citizens and have their best interest at heart, so the citizens must submit to its authority. However, there is an authority order that must be addressed. There are 3 divine institutions ordained by God: family, government, and church. All fit into the authoritative structure which is inherent in creation, and each requires submission by its constituents to those in authority. The Christian must submit to

the government, to the church, to their own family authority, and above all, to the Lord. He must do so as long as an authority figure does not overreach his authority inappropriately, understanding that God is the final authority.

The government is to rule and lead with the best interest of its citizens as its priority. Rom. 13:1-5 speaks of a government that leads in an upright and honest manner: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever, therefore, resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation [judgment]. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore, ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." The same principle occurs in 1 Pet. 2:13-14. Ideally, we will live in a society where justice is served and where godly morality is honored. We are to submit to every law of man for the Lord's sake. This is pleasing to Him!

But what happens when the appropriate order is shifted or warped? Do we have the right to rebel against an unrighteous government and unrighteous laws? The same question is seen in similar contexts, though maybe not on as large a scale in each of the three institutions ordained by God. What happens when the family leadership is not acting in a responsible manner? What about a church member who strongly believes the leadership is teaching false doctrine or acting in an unbiblical way? Do they have the right to act against their leadership? These are difficult questions which we must address very carefully.

The wife of the unsaved man is instructed to submit and live peaceably with her husband, attempting to lead him to the Lord by her loving testimony (1 Pet. 3:1-7). Children are instructed to obey their parents in all things (Eph. 6:1-4). In each of these situations, rebellion is not the answer, but a peaceful trust of the Lord that He will work all things together for good according to His will (Rom. 8:28). Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. If there is sinful abuse occurring in the family, that is another

situation entirely and must be dealt with in a way that ensures the protection of those who are being abused. But generally, rebellion is never the answer.

The child of God is instructed to come out from among those who would teach falsehood and be separate (2 Cor. 6:17). He is to separate from those who are apostate or are accepting apostasy. He is to speak out against those who would teach false doctrine, but his primary duty is to separate and keep himself pure before the Lord. However, I do not see in Scripture the instruction to bring crashing down by force an unrighteous church. That is simply not our responsibility, but the Lord's. We are to peaceably separate and trust the Lord for His will to be done.

Perhaps the premier verse concerning how we should respond to an unrighteous government is found in the verses preceding Romans 13. Rom. 12:19-21 says: "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirsts, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good." We are instructed to not seek vengeance, but to leave that to the Lord. Our mandate is to preach Christ and to do what is true and right.

Let me close with one last reminder about the state of the world in which these verses were first written. The apostles set a precedent in the temple at the very beginning of the church. When told by the high priest and the Jewish leadership to stop preaching the Lord Jesus Christ, their answer was simple, and their choice was clear. Even after being imprisoned and again brought before the Council, their answer was the same: "We ought to obey God rather than men," and they preached the gospel to them (Acts 5:29-31). This enraged the Council, who were ready to execute them until Gamaliel stood up and declared truthfully: "And now I say unto you, refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38-39).

The next verses (and the rest of the book of Acts) tell the outcome of Gamaliel's words: "And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And

they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:40-41).

They did not rise up in rebellion against the established Jewish leaders. They did not seek to overthrow the Council and take over the temple. Even throughout the early church, as it is seen in the remainder of the New Testament, Christians did not seek to overthrow Rome and set up a government that would honor God. They did what they had been instructed by the Lord to do and left the rest up to the Lord. They preached Christ no matter what the

cost! We do not know what we may be called on to do for the Lord. We do not know how much freedom we will be allowed by the government to preach the gospel of Christ and practice our Christian way of life, the life that honors Almighty God.

But even the gates of hell itself will never prevail against us if we are true to the one who has called us. Let us unashamedly and unapologetically proclaim the name of Jesus and salvation through Him alone. This is our mandate, and we will proclaim it so long as God lends us the breath and life to do so. May the Lord bless the IBFNA and strengthen it for whatever task he lays on us by which to serve Him.

A Personal Tribute to Dr. Richard Harris

By Pastor Mark Strangman

Editor's Note: Our Savior welcomed Dr. Richard Harris, His servant, into His presence on January 14 after over sixty years of faithful pastoral ministry. Our brother first planted and then pastored Bethel Baptist Church in Sellersville, PA for most of his ministry. Concerned about changes he had seen in his beloved GARBC, Dr. Harris led first the Regular Baptists for Revival and then the IBFNA as our first moderator. Dr. Harris also served as President of the American Council of Christian Churches and a long-time member of its Executive Committee. Among his many publications, his ACCC pamphlet titled, "A Plea for Christian Statesmanship," reflects well the wisdom, balance, and conviction of our brother's love for Christ and His church. [The pamphlet is available at acc4truth.org.]

On Thursday, January 14, the IBFNA felt the sting of loss with the home-going of our beloved brother, Dr. Richard Harris. As a young man entering our Fellowship in the early 1990's, I was a part-time Assistant Pastor from a strong GARBC background trying to navigate the confusing terrain of Fundamentalism at that time. My Senior Pastor, Dr. Dan Brown, introduced me to many different preachers and wonderful brothers and sisters in Christ, and truthfully, it all seemed quite overwhelming. I remember once sitting at a meal and observing so many who were seasoned in ministry, feeling somewhat out of place. But then a kind gentleman and his dear wife approached me and with a warm smile asked if they could sit down and eat lunch with me. That began a wonderful relationship with Dr. and Mrs. Harris that



has been for me a cherished highlight of our Fellowship for close to 25 years.

Dr. Harris was a brilliant preacher and loving, compassionate pastor, but to me, he was a kind and gentle friend, someone whom I could always depend on for a wonderful smile and an encouraging word. I enjoyed knowing that he would replace me as I transitioned from my former ministry to my current pastorate and feeling confident that he would be faithful in leading as the Interim Pastor of my former church. We have had to say goodbye to a dear brother and good friend, someone who was a "pastor's pastor" and a beloved mentor for many of us.

As one of the original leaders of our Fellowship, Dr. Harris paved our way through the issues of separation, encouraging us to stand firm against those who would compromise true biblical Fundamentalism. He was always a great encouragement to us to stay the course whatever the cost. As we remember Dick and his great leadership in our Fellowship, we are reminded of the motivating words of Paul to the church at Corinth, which Dr. Harris exemplified so well: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1Cor. 15:58).

Election 2020: What's the Problem?

By Pastor Nick Stelzig

Editor's Note: Pastor Nick Stelzig began planting Community Baptist Church in the city of Lawrence, MA during the pandemic fears of last year. With our churches under threat of Covid-related fines and with uninvestigated election irregularities undermining the confidence of many Americans in the durability of our constitutional protections, Pastor Stelzig's article reminds us Who is in charge and what He has called our churches to do.

I just finished reading an article from the *Boston Globe* about the conservative shift in my community. The author pointed out that Lawrence is an “overwhelmingly Democratic city,” and I would agree with that assessment. But the author goes on to point out the fact that the percentage of Trump voters went from 15% in 2016 to 25% in 2020. The author and those she interviewed attributed this shift toward conservatism to Lawrence's being “a city with a solid religious conservative base that has prioritized antiabortion convictions and social conservative ideals.” This sounds like a win for the conservative cause, and in my opinion, this is a political win.

Personally, my political views are very conservative. I am unapologetically pro-life, and it is my commitment to the truth of God's Word that makes me pro-life. I was somewhat surprised to find an article posted by a school board member who has radically liberal ideas, who is a fundraiser for Planned Parenthood, and who has even made social media posts promoting Communism. The views of his commentary in the article were different from mine. As I read the article and his comments, something stood out to me. For many in our city, the most apparent impact being made by churches is a political one. This is a problem.

After the presidential election of 2016, I remember seeing electoral maps all over social media. Many believers discussed the need for church planting in the more liberal areas of our country. I remember reading things like, “if you are wondering where to plant churches, the blue spots would be a good place to start.” In fact, I liked and shared a number of those posts.

Now confession time: we were on deputation during the 2016 election. There was a lot of fear

about what our nation was going to look like if Mrs. Clinton won. It was not unusual for me to use the political climate of New England as a reason to support church planting ministries (namely the Stelzig's ministry). I realize now that public policy is a wrong motivation for church planting and Great Commission ministry.

I stayed up on election night and watched the news coverage, breathing a sigh of relief once the hoped-for results were in. The next day, we had another meeting in a church. I remember commenting to my wife that people were not nearly as enthused about church planting as they had been just days earlier, and I observed this in churches in the weeks to follow.

Now we are here planting a church in the midst of a pandemic in a city with “a solid religious conservative base that has prioritized antiabortion convictions and social conservative ideals.” Again, I agree with that assessment. However, judging from my experience with the solidly religious and socially conservative people in our city, most of them are lost.

The catalyst for the tilt toward conservatism in our city was not Nick Stelzig's church-planting ministry. The reality is that the move toward social conservatism was already in motion before we got here. What was not here? — a solid, Bible-preaching church full of people who are actively sharing the gospel and living a consistent Christian life before their community.

The fact is that a move toward conservative political values in a community does not replace a godly church. A move toward conservative policy can be promoted by churches (of any type) that are motivated to change the next election to reflect their values. This has been evident in our city. But what change do those churches really bring? Maybe a conservative government for the next four years or until we elect a different one.

In the six months since we started Community Baptist Church, we have seen three people saved. I do not know much about their political leanings.

Honestly, we have not really discussed it. What we have discussed is how their salvation should change how they live. We are encouraging them to develop a personal relationship with their Savior. We are discussing the importance of their sharing their faith with others, and we are working to show them the need to identify with Christ in baptism.

This Sunday, I will stand before a room of about 20-25 people, a half-dozen of whom still need to believe the gospel. What I preach to that handful of people during the next four years will probably never sway an election in our city, nor will it change the next four years of policy-making in our country. What I preach to those people will, however, affect eternity.

So, what is the problem? Let me explain. When the election of a temporary governmental official causes us to be more vocal about our political opinions than we are about the eternal truths of God's Word, we have a priority problem. When we view a whole region of millions of people as voters rather than eternal souls, we have a values problem. When we put out political signs and stickers or wear our MAGA hats for our neighbors to see, but we have never shared Christ with them, we have an allegiance problem. When we spend more time online as

amateur election-fraud investigators than we do studying the Word of God, we have a time-management problem. When we spend hours on the phone petitioning our elected officials but spend no more than ten minutes of the day in prayer, we have a trust problem. When people in our community know more about the political stance of our church, its pastor, or its membership, than they do about the gospel we have been called to preach, we have a messaging problem. We have a problem. It is not a problem with the election process, and its solution is not taking up residence in the White House or the Congress. Ours is a problem in our hearts.

God has not called churches to bring about political change. He has called us to be assemblies who faithfully preach the gospel and live consistent, Christ-honoring lives before our community for His glory. We minister not so that the next four years of policy-making will be changed, but so that the eternity of people who are still without Christ can be changed. Let us not settle to proselytize for temporary political reform. Instead, in obedience to the King of kings and Lord of lords, who will rule and reign for all eternity, let us get busy doing the job that only we, Christ's churches, can do! Christ will build His church. The gates of hell shall not prevail.

2021 IBFNA Family Conference

June 22-24

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness: 30 Years of God’s Faithfulness”

Grace Baptist Church

1000 Oakhill Ave.

Attleboro, MA 02703

Host Pastor: Jeff Bailey

Family Attractions: Historic Boston and more

Morning Devotions: Vic Perry

Preaching Sessions: Jeff Bailey, Dan Greenfield (ACCC), Paul Gustine, Mike McCubbins, John Radacsy, Bob Thompson, Mark Strangman, Bob Payne

Philadelphia, PA 19120-2123
521 E. Godfrey Avenue
Independent Baptist Fellowship of North America



www.ibfna.org



www.facebook.com/ibfna



Independent Baptist Fellowship of North America

A UNIQUE FELLOWSHIP

Standing Strong for the Faith Once Delivered!