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THE REVIEW

The Perfect Peace of God

By Pastor Mark Strangman, Moderator IBFNA

There is a well-known slogan, which I once saw on a bumper sticker, that has stuck with me for many years: "Know God - Know Peace / No God - No Peace!" This innocent little quip speaks volumes of truth from God's Word about the state of our world. In Rom. 3:17, Paul tells us that "the way of peace [the world] has not known." In that same passage, he declares that none are righteous and that none seek after God. In fact, there are none that God even considers good. Paul gives several other conditions for the state of the world in Romans 3, but in his conclusion, he reveals the true basis for the unrest in the world around us - "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (v. 18).

Scripture warns us that the state of unrest and the absence of peace in the world will only get worse as God counts down the minutes of the last days. In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul shares with us just how this will occur: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety'; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (vv. 1-5).

Now as God's children, born again through our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we do not fear when faced with this truth. We also read in this passage that God has not appointed believers to this wrath; but rather, believers may even take comfort in this truth. Earlier in this same letter, Paul tells believers of the glorious return of the Lord Jesus for us in the Rapture. In fact, twice he urges them to take comfort in these truths.

So how exactly do we deal with the lack of a genuine fear of the Lord in the world around us? Many will preach "peace and safety" and urge people to embrace one false way after another. Whether it is a secular way or a religious way, these false preachers tell people just to be good, to accept and love each other, and all will be fine. We see all around us example after example of tolerance without moral consideration, acceptance without honest understanding, and the constant desire to live only for the moment without a true and eternal perspective. Love is essential, but it cannot be the adequate answer apart from biblical truth. Acceptance and forbearance are admirable and right, but without moral guidance they only lead to sinful depravity. Society has left God and the Bible out of the center of its judgment for far too long, and we are seeing the results of this in our world today.



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But we see a greater truth in Scripture: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." Yes, the world is in disarray. It may have a moral turnaround for a time, but eventually it will fall.

Jesus spoke to the reason for His coming to the world in very strong terms. In Matt. 10:34-39, He said, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Here Jesus spoke of the impossibility of peace apart from the acceptance of His cross. Even in families there would not be peace. There is "No Peace" without knowing the Lord Jesus and His salvation.

In Luke 1 Zacharias, in his prophecy about his son John, spoke of the ministry of the Messiah: "To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (v. 79). Jesus came to bring us to the state of peace. Remember the glorious praise of the heavenly host at His birth: "Peace on earth, good will to men." He came to be our peace, as He reconciles us to the Father and ends our enmity with God, "for He is our peace" (Eph. 2:11-16; Rom. 5:1).

This is the message that we must present to everyone around us. We must bear that light shining in the darkness. The whole world must know that there is no peace apart from salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. But are we qualified to deliver this all-important message? Can we deliver the good news of the gospel to people who are lost if we are not demonstrating the Lord's peace in our lives?

I believe there is another pandemic at work in our day and age - the reality that many Christians today have lost the ability to be at rest in the Lord.

Obviously, there are some who are the exception to this pervasive problem. You might genuinely be at rest in the Lord Jesus today, and praise God if you are. However, many Christians, for whatever reason, whether sin in their lives or a lack of faith, are struggling with being at rest in this restless world. They have reverted to the problem presented in Rom. 5:18 - they do not have the proper fear of the Lord. The fear of the Lord is a lofty doctrine, and we do not have the time to cover it properly here, so it will therefore be the subject of my next article for you. Let me summarize by saying that the proper view of God guarantees the proper place of rest in the Christian. When we see the Lord as we should, we cannot help but live in the state of perfect peace (Isaiah 26:3: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee").

Jesus taught His disciples about the peace He would give them. Right before His arrest, He told them, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." "Leave" is in the present indicative, stating it was given at that time to remain with them. He gave them peace, which would be present when they needed it later that crucifixion evening. This same peace, the peace of Jesus Christ, is promised to every believer at the time they need it. In fact, it is always with us as He is always with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. Peace is not some mystical feeling one gets by quoting a mantra or practicing a meditation. It is the presence of a person, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 4 Paul gives us the truth of that precious peace. He presents to us how we can dwell in that perfect peace. There are 4 imperatives given in verses 4-7, which bring us to that perfect state of restful peace.

First, we are to "rejoice in the Lord." The Greek word used here is *chairō*, the calm, happy assurance we can have in the Lord. This is the inward state of the resting child of God, totally trusting in the Lord's care for him. It is in no way dependent on our circumstances, but instead often despite them. This peaceful believer is the one who is walking with the Lord and truly blessed (Psalm 1).

Second, we are to “let [our] moderation be known unto all men.” The word translated *moderation* is often attributed to self-control. Though this is a major aspect of moderation, the word also emphasizes gentleness. It is the understanding of what is appropriate or acceptable. The true understanding of this word calls for what would be appropriate for a child of the Most High. It is to become like Jesus. When life and the world hit us hard, do we respond with moderation?

The third command is to “be careful for nothing.” I am sure you know the word translated as *careful* means *anxious*. We are never to worry or to be anxious. This seems to be a rising problem in the church today. Many are fearful for tomorrow. Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in Me.” Many today are worried about different things, and some even to the point of fear. Paul tells us to bring everything to the Lord with thanksgiving. No matter what the concern, there is relief at the throne of God!

The final command involves our thought life – to “think on these things.” The list Paul provides includes wholesome, godly subjects that should occupy our thoughts.

In conclusion, the peace of God is beyond our understanding. This means that we cannot truly explain the vast riches of God. It is greater than we can ever understand. What we do know is that it will “keep our hearts and minds.” This is the military concept of a mounting guard. Jesus builds a protective garrison which will help you to not lose heart and to dwell in His great love. Do you understand these truths today? Is there anything that you are struggling with or worrying about? Are you at rest in the Lord Jesus today? Bring it before His throne and be at rest. May God richly bless you with His perfect peace, and may God bless the IBFNA.

Local Church Unity in Days of Pandemic Concern

By Pastor Kevin Hobi

In our Savior we have a Great High Priest who prayed for us, His churches (John 17). Our Lord prayed knowing that the hour of His suffering for our sins had come and desiring that the Father would glorify Him so that He could glorify His Father (v. 1). He prayed for us, given to Him by the Father, to whom He has manifested the name of the Father, we who have kept and believed the Word He has given to us (vv. 6-7). He prayed for our unity in sanctity. He prayed that we would be one through the name, Holy Father, and He prayed that we would be sanctified in the truth, which is His Word (vv. 11, 17). Jesus prayed not for the world (v. 9). He prayed for us who are in the world, but not of the world (vv. 11, 16). We were given to Him out of the world (v. 6).

As the Apostle Paul exhorts the local church of Philippi to like-mindedness, the same love, the one accord of one mind, he explains that this blessing must be achieved by putting aside strife, pride, and selfishness (Phil. 2:1-4). Paul exhorts church members to set their mind on the obedient humility of

servanthood, on which their Savior set His mind as the hour of His suffering approached. He obeyed unto death, even the death of the cross (vv. 5-8).

Paul practiced what he preached to the Philippians. He summarized the mission he embraced as a disciple of Christ in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders: “the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:23-24). These co-laborers, who had seen Paul risk his life repeatedly to testify in this way, knew that he spoke the truth.

These are the truths at the core of the life of every disciple of Christ. He is called to deny himself, to take up his cross daily, and to follow his Savior (Luke 9:23). Days of pandemic concern are no different in this regard. They are not exceptions to this rule. In the face of a pandemic, Jesus still has

prayed for our unity in sanctity. Putting away strife, pride, and selfishness is still necessary for like-mindedness. Christlike, humble, and obedient service is still our calling. Holding our lives dearer to ourselves than these things never is. Our course of ministry, received from the Lord Jesus, continues through days of pandemic concern. We are Christ's churches. We must testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

The zeitgeist of pandemic concern can militate against this calling we share. It has inspired many of the people of the world, out of which we have been given to the Savior, to look not every man on the things of others, but instead on his own things.¹ Ignorant of the promise of God's sovereign protection and enslaved by the devil through the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15), they find their only hope for survival in lockdowns, masks, vaccines, medicines, ventilators, and isolation.

Believers do not oppose any of these measures when they are necessary for the protection of public health, but the spirit of fear that accompanies these sometimes-necessary measures is foreign to the heart empowered by the Spirit of God. He has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind, which strengthens us to obey (2 Tim. 1:7).

In addition, although believers often disagree on the wisdom of public health measures and the nature of the politics surrounding them,² we understand that the unity to which we are called as local churches must survive these disagreements for the sake of our mission and the love of our Savior. The Bible teaches, not that our churches are filled with "vaccers" and "antivaccers," but with brothers and sisters, some of whom are stronger, and others who are weaker. Our unity will survive when stronger brothers, those who are right on an issue, care well for weaker brothers, those who are wrong (Romans 14-15).

Every believer who believes he has the right position on the Covid vaccine, for instance, has certain New Testament local-church responsibilities to care for the unity of his church's gospel work. Stronger brothers must bear the misunderstanding of their weaker counterparts rather than please themselves (15:1); they must understand the importance of pa-

tiently waiting for weaker brothers to become convinced of the right understanding in their own minds (14:5); and they refuse to fail to love those for whom Christ died (14:15). Stronger brothers understand that even in areas of disagreement, those who disagree often do so for the glory of the Lord and in service to Him (14:6).

For the sake of the care of our local churches and the furtherance of their gospel work (Psalm 133), may we resolve to hear again our Savior's prayer for the unity in sanctity of our local churches. May we who know the Lord resist the spirit of fear that causes our churches to weaken, to not love one another, and to become misinformed and illogical in our conclusions about healthcare. May we pray for the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind to humbly obey the commands of our Savior and finish our course together with joy.

We can accomplish these goals with the Lord's help if stronger brothers will work to care for weaker brothers as each local church navigates together divisive and confusing days of pandemic concern. In addition, each believer must place his trust, not merely in the best measures of men to deal with threats to public health, but ultimately in the protection of Him who covers us in His secret place. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely, he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence" (Ps. 91:1-3).

Endnotes

1. Paul: "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Phil. 2:4).
2. For example, the question of vaccination choice is debated among believers. For the position that vaccination is our duty as believers, see Dr. David Vallance, "I'm a Christian. Why Should I Get a Covid-19 Vaccine?" (heaven4sure.com/2021/01/11/im-a-christian-why-should-i-get-a-covid-19-vaccine/). For a second opinion, see the work of Dr. Peter McCullough at americaoutloud.com/the-mccullough-report/, who highlights vaccine safety concerns, the importance of informed consent, and the need for a greater emphasis on early treatment protocols for Covid-19.

What Do We Do About Vaccine Mandates?

By Pastor Kevin Hobi

This past Tuesday morning, I prayed with an airline pilot whose job is threatened unless he submits to his company's mandate to receive the experimental vaccines of Operation Warp Speed. His daughter has lost her job at a well-known Massachusetts hospital over her concerns about the unknown long-term effects of the mRNA technology on young women, and his wife will likely no longer be able to work in New Hampshire as a medical technician due to the same imposition of what some medical experts have begun to call "medical tyranny."¹ Another nurse practitioner in our church will be losing her job in a few weeks.

As an aging American who recently has needed more healthcare, not less, and who also likes to travel by air, I must say that I wonder how much more of this our nation can take. But those are only concerns about healthcare and travel. Hundreds of thousands of our 2.1 million military troops are not yet vaccinated as the deadline imposed by our nation's President nears.² Undoubtedly, the readiness of our national defense will also suffer from this form of leadership.

In the interest of full disclosure, I have not been vaccinated with the mRNA experimental vaccines, although I am thankful for other vaccinations that I have received over my lifetime, which were developed under standard research safety protocols. I have godly fellow believers in my life who have been vaccinated for Covid, believing that they were doing their duty before the Lord for the sake of their own health and love of neighbor. I have a dear brother and mentor in the Lord, a co-laborer whom I love in Christ, who let me know that he believes hospitals should mandate vaccinations for their staff. He shared this after I told him that my daughter would be losing her nursing job unless she agreed to a religious exemption.

As believers we need to understand what to do about vaccine mandates. Many of you who read this article will not agree with me on the efficacy and safety of the Operation Warp Speed vaccines themselves, but I hope that fact can be beside the point of this discussion. I believe that understand-

ing what to do about the mandates must be built instead on three foundational philosophical commitments that ought to be affirmed in the heart of every believer.

Individual Rights or the Common Good?

In 1920, the year after Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles outlining the terms of their surrender after World War I, Adolf Hitler stood before a packed Munich Hofbräuhaus to outline the Nazi Party's antisemitic 25-point plan for the nation's future. Hitler's 24th point advanced the common good over individual rights: "It [the Nazi Party] fights against the Jewish materialist spirit within [their country] and without and is convinced that a lasting recovery of our folk can only come from within on the principle: common good before individual good."

Hitler's concluding 25th point explained what was necessary for the common good to take precedent over the good of the individual in Germany: "In order to carry out this program we demand: the creation of a strong central authority in the State, the unconditional authority by the political central parliament of the whole State and all its organizations. The formation of professional committees and of committees representing the several estates of the realm, to ensure that the laws promulgated by the central authority shall be carried out by the federal states." The Nazi vision for Germany's future depended on socialism, the "unconditional authority" of a centralized and unchallenged state power.

The contrast between this advocacy of the common good and our nation's founding faith in the Creator's gift to individuals of unalienable human rights could not be sharper. One must look no further than *The Declaration of Independence* to find our forefathers' doctrine. James Madison wrote: "It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to Him [the Creator]. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. Before any man can be

considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe" [*Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments*, 1785].

Public health orders were used in Hitler's Germany to advance the Nazi vision of the common good. Dietrich Bonhoeffer of the Lutheran Confessing Church wrote of the inviolability of the individual's body in a day of eugenics through forced sterilization: "Without a doubt it involves a grave intrusion into the human right to bodily inviolability, and the danger is overwhelmingly great that once this boundary has been crossed—even in an ultimately responsible way—soon all the boundaries that are set by the human right to bodily inviolability will fall" [*Ethics* (Fortress Press Readers Edition, 139)].

Bonhoeffer was an enigmatic neo-orthodox theology teacher who did not affirm the inerrancy of Scripture (and who was executed by the Nazis at the age of 39, one month prior to VE Day), but his insights about an individual's body are correct. After World War II, the Nuremberg code of medical ethics established the principle of informed consent, affirming this inviolability of the individual's body as a God-given human right.

Paul assumes this truth when he instructs believers about what they, not the governing authorities, must do with their own bodies as individuals. We must present them to the Lord as living sacrifices that are not conformed to this world (Rom. 12:1-2), and we must discipline our bodies for the glory of the Lord with self-control, not according to governmental control (1 Cor. 9:27). Our bodies are bought by our Savior with a price, so we must glorify God in our bodies, not become the servants of men (1 Cor. 6:20, 7:23). To lose the inviolability of your body is to become a slave.

Religious exemption or freedom?

Some vaccine mandates come with provisions for religious exemptions. Religious exemptions have been used before. In colonial Massachusetts, the certificate law of 1771 made it possible for Baptists and other dissenting denominations to obtain a religious exemption from taxation levied for the state-church. The law provided exemption for those whose

names shall be contained in a list or lists which shall be exhibited to the assessors . . . on or before the first day of September in that year and signed by three principal members of the antipedobaptist congregation to which he or she belongs and the minister thereof (if any there be), who shall therein certify that the persons whose names are contained in the said list or lists are really belonging thereto, that they verily believe them to be conscientiously of their persuasion, and that they do frequently and usually, when able, attend the public worship of God in such congregation on the Lord's Day [William G. McLoughlin ed., *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets 1754-1789* (Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1968), p. 45, fn. 21].

Our nation's forefather, Isaac Backus, led Baptist opposition to the measure for five reasons: (1) the exemption practice implied that civil authorities can set up one religion over another; (2) civil authorities should represent the people in fulfillment of civil obligations, not ecclesial obligations like charitable giving; (3) the conscience of an individual should not need to be certified to state authorities; (4) the measure puts an earthly power between Christ and his people; and (5) coercive measures targeting religion tend to provoke civil unrest [pp. 44-45].

Today, believers and their fellow citizens are offered religious exemptions from vaccine mandates. The parallels with colonial Massachusetts are clear. Whereas Baptists under Backus's leadership united to oppose this governmental overreach, in our day each pilot, nurse, and doctor must decide on his own whether to accept a religious exemption. Some have accepted one, either troubled over the role of fetal tissue and human embryo in vaccine research or in obedience to the biblical doctrine of the inviolability of the human body and the ethical need for informed consent. Others have refused both the vaccines and their exemptions on grounds held by Backus and his colleagues. Each varying decision against the mandate, with or without a religious exemption, is an act requiring the courage of our Baptist forefathers, and it has been a blessing to see that courage lived out in the lives of many today. Backus's example is not needed for uncon-

cerned submission to governmental vaccine mandates.

The spirit of fear or the faith of courage?

The choice between fear and courage, of course, is an easy one in theory but difficult in practice. We all seek courage rather than fear, but proper caution regarding healthcare also avoids the reckless abandon of fools (“A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident” – Prov. 14:16). Still, the fear of death is a satanic and spiritually destructive force in this world of unbelief (Heb. 2:15). Paul lists three components of the courage that is the opposite of this harmful fear: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7). So, we need to choose the spirit that causes us to be strong in the Lord’s power, loving to others, and well-informed and logical in our healthcare decisions.

The Lord promises His protection over us in Psalm 91, protection even from the “noisome pestilence” (v. 3). We need to affirm His sovereign control over our lives by trusting Him to provide this level of protection. But we must also remember that Satan used this same Psalm to tempt Jesus to jump off the temple tower while trusting angels to catch Him (Matt. 4:6). In response, Jesus affirmed that tempting the Lord is a sin that Scripture forbids (v. 7). This means that we choose the spirit of courage over the spirit of fear, not by jumping off a high-rise

building, but by focusing on the power, love, and sound-mind His Spirit can give to us as we seek to obey Him, remembering that His promised protection is real. These virtues and remembrances control our decisions, not fear. We attend church obediently, trusting the protection of Psalm 91, but we do not jump off the church steeple after the service.

Endeavoring to make good decisions while facing vaccine mandates, believers will come to different conclusions about whether to obey the mandate or to refuse. Those who refuse to obey a vaccine mandate will do so for different reasons. When the day comes that we are confronted with these choices, may we make that choice affirming individual human rights, committed to the preservation of American freedom, and controlled by the godly courage of power, love, and a sound mind.

Endnotes

1. See the 10/26/2021 interview titled “Paralysis of Hospital Care for COVID-19” between Dr. Peter McCullough and Dr. Richard Amerling (<https://www.americaoutloud.com/paralysis-of-hospital-care-for-covid-19/>).
2. Alex Horton, “Hundreds of thousands of US troops have not yet complied with vaccine mandate as deadlines near.” *The Washington Post*, October 10, 2021 (<https://www.stripes.com/covid/2021-10-10/us-military-covid-vaccine-mandate-unvaccinated-3191964.html>).

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