



# IBFNA

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# THE REVIEW

## The God of the Universe is the God of the Minutiae

By Pastor Mark Strangman, Moderator IBFNA

In my article in the November 2021 issue of *The Review*, I said we would conclude the idea of the perfect peace of God in this issue. But I would like to pause that thought, come back to it next time, and share something else with you, something that definitely affects the peace of God in our lives. Perhaps more than at any other time in my 60 years, I am uncertain of what tomorrow may hold for our lives. Now please do not misunderstand what I am saying. The whole purpose of this article is to biblically reinforce the understanding that God is in complete control over, not only the vast span of history, but each moment that passes in the daily life of the believer.

However, sometimes it does seem difficult to see His hand directly moving in the details of life. A brother or sister loses his job due to his nonacceptance of a mandate he does not believe to be morally right. A missionary struggles because of losing support due to the financial hardships of supporters as a result of the pandemic. A loved-one becomes desperately sick, even to the brink of death. Some have even lost loved-ones. All of these scenarios I have witnessed in recent days, as have many of you, and our hearts cry out to God for answers and direction.

But these things are, for the most part, beyond our comprehension, and left to our own understanding, we come far short. Some even begin to doubt their Lord. This is precisely the time we must flee to the refuge of the Lord and His Word. Prov. 3:5-6 reminds us to "trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

As we rest in the comfort of the Spirit's leading in the Word, we are reassured of the majestic power and glory of our God as displayed in numerous places in Scripture. We read of His vast immensity and almighty power in the creating and sustaining of all things in Genesis 1-2, John 1, and Colossians 1. We read of His great love and mercy as He saves us thorough His matchless grace in Ephesians 2 and Titus 3. And in Romans 8, we learn of the intimate and personal relationship He has with each of those whom He has saved. Verse 28 has truly been a great blessing to those who know Christ as their Lord and Savior: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." This promise has revived our spirits on many occasions with the depth of God's love and care for us.

But I believe we do God's grace a great disservice if we do not recognize the context in which this great promise is given to us. This passage dealing with God's provi-



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sion of salvation and the security the believer has in Him is centered on the concept of God's complete plan for each of us. We are not saved by chance or by a whim. We are bought with a price, the precious blood of Christ, who was foreordained before the foundation of the world to be the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 1:18-20).

This same word *foreordained* used in 1 Peter referencing our Savior is used of us (translated in the KJV as *foreknow*) in Rom. 8:29. The context is the predestined will of God for those who accept His gift of eternal life. He has chosen us, saved us, adopted us, sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise, and blessed us with the inheritance of eternal life and all the spiritual blessings found in the heavens in Christ (Eph. 1:3-14). My point is to declare the immensity of God as clearly demonstrated in the salvation of each of us who has accepted Christ. Through His great grace, God has justified us, redeemed us, forgiven us, and made us acceptable to Him in the Beloved One (*agapao* in Eph. 1:6), our wonderful Savior.

In Romans 8 we see our salvation demonstrated by the word *called* used in verses 28 and 30. These are two different words used in Greek, and though they have similar meanings, they have different emphases. In verse 28 the word translated *called* is the Greek word *kletos*, meaning *invited or identified*. It is used in several places to identify those who are called to be saints (Rom. 1:6-7; 1 Cor. 1:2) or apostles (Rom. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:1). In Rom. 8:28, Paul is referring to the calling we have received to be Christ's chosen saints. What a precious promise this is, reinforced by the context at the end of Romans 8, the divine security with which we have been blessed.

In Romans 8:30, the word translated *called* is *kaleo*, the more common word, having the idea of a calling to a specific name, invitation, or purpose. It can also have the verbal concept of calling someone forth from something. In Heb. 11:8, Abraham is called out of Ur to go to the land God promised him. This is indicative of His being called out of his old life and into the new life that God had planned for him. The same word is used 10 verses later, referring to Isaac and the covenant promise being carried forward through him.

There are many other uses of this word in the New Testament, and across them all is the concept of *calling to something specific*, usually in the strength of God's calling to sanctification. This is the context of Rom. 8:30. We have received the call of God to Himself, being called out of the world and sin unto a relationship with Him. We have been called and justified with the guarantee of glorification. Praise the Lord for His provision for our eternal life.

As marvelous as the principle of God's calling is, even more amazing is the understanding that He is not only the God of our eternity, but also of our daily lives. The majestic power which created the universe is the same power which tends to our every need. The Lord of the universe is the Lord of the minutiae. Every mundane moment is God's specific concern. We read that all things work together for our good, but do we really understand and believe this to be the case?

Let's think on this specifically and draw some conclusions that relate to the struggles we are experiencing. (1) "And we know." The word Paul uses here is *eido*. Vines says, "*eido* tends to indicate a fullness of knowledge and understanding." This is the deeper truth of Scripture, the mature Christian's response to God's working in his life. We know and are completely assured that God is working out His plan and purpose in everything in our lives.

This brings us to the next emphasis of the verse. (2) "All things." This is one primary word meaning *the whole*. The entirety of our life, every part of it, is God's plan for our lives. Next, we see the result of God's plan. (3) "Work together for good." Everything works toward the good purpose of God for us. The Greek word translated *work together* is *sunergeo*, *to cooperate or help*. The same root word is used by Paul to indicate those who worked with him in the ministry. All these things we experience are literally co-laborers in God's purpose for our lives. Finally, we see the essential application. (4) "Them that love God and who are the called according to His purpose." These are the true followers of the Lord, those who have been born again by grace through faith in Jesus' sacrifice for them, the ones who are identified with the Lord Jesus Christ as His disciples.

Do we see God's hand working in everything in our lives? Paul puts an interesting condition in the

verse, indicating a level of devotion on the part of the disciples. He declares that they are those who love God. This is agape love, a love that is unconditional and self-sacrificing. Now I ask you, can we deeply and completely show this kind of love to God at every moment, the same way he does with every possible thing in our lives?

I think we all would have to agree that our love often fluctuates and sometimes wavers. Perhaps the idea is that it is impossible to know this principle of God's care unless we are demonstrating that depth of love back to Him. Jesus said if you love me, keep my commandments. You and I both know that we sometimes fail in this level of devotion to Him. The point is that if we want to understand God's great working in our lives, we must be demonstrating that level of devotion to Him.

Let me conclude with sharing some observations that come from this kind of understanding of God's working, especially related to the present state of the world. There has been much debate and many hardships resulting from the current state of our society during the viral crisis or pandemic. Whatever you feel about the government's handling of the situation, we all must admit that there have been great struggles and tragic loss for many. There are multitudes living in fear, and even many of God's children are living in anxiety and uncertainty.

This must not be. We must realize that God has not departed from his promise that everything in our lives works together for the good of His purpose. The passage we cited in Eph. 1:3-14 makes it clear that His purpose for those He has chosen is to predestine them to be adopted as His children and to become like Christ (Rom. 8:29). He is still doing this in spite of any hardships we might go through. Here are three observations that have been brought to my attention, which I would like to leave with you.

1. The vaccine mandate has caused the medical community to come under some long-needed scrutiny concerning the ethics and morality of their research practices. Though there is great debate over the vaccine, all of us can see that there are serious issues in the production and testing of medicines and vaccines. I firmly believe and stand against abortion, and any use of aborted babies to research

and produce medicine is unethical and immoral. I know some argue that these were elected abortions, so it is okay to use them to advance medical research. To that I say that all abortion is a criminal. It cannot justify research that devalues human life. Shame on us for not holding our medical community to a higher ethical standard. Praise the Lord for the exposure this virus has created.

2. Even though the vaccine mandate has been revoked (praise the Lord for something that finally makes sense!), there were many who had to make a choice according to their conscience. Many took a difficult stand resulting in a greater opportunity to witness for the Lord. This virus has given us unparalleled opportunity to witness of God's love and mercy. "We will not fear though the earth be removed" (Psalm 46:2). We have a great God, whom we know and trust to work out all things. We must share this message of hope and salvation to all around us, especially those living in fear.

3. The virus has brought clarity to our stand for Christ as churches, called out assemblies of His disciples, who must worship as He dictates. The true church of the Lord cannot function purely over the internet. Again, please do not misunderstand. The internet has become a great tool for the furtherance of the gospel, but God's people must be physically together for worship and fellowship. And we must sing. We are commanded in Scripture to sing unto the Lord and to each other (Col. 3:15-17, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him"). A church that pleases the Lord must do as He demands.

I realize there are still many questions and unknowns in the world today. But one thing we can be assured of: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." Let's face these times with confidence knowing that "greater is He that is in [ua], than he that is in the world." May God bless the IBFNA. See you all in June in Hanover, PA!

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# A Good Testimony in Days of Covid Fear

By Pastor Kevin Hobi

I recently stumbled across a Daily Wire article with an intriguing title, “How the Federal Government Used Evangelical Leaders to Spread Covid Propaganda to Churches,” by Megan Basham. The article is highly critical of prominent non-separatist evangelicals for their lack of discernment during our nation’s days of Covid fear. The list of luminaries criticized in the article includes Ed Stetzer, the Executive Director of The Billy Graham Center and former Editor of *Christianity Today*; Joe Carter, Editor for The Gospel Coalition; Russel Moore, former President of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; Tim Keller, former Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church (PCA); and Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church (SBC).

The criticism leveled in the article centers on their support for NIH Director Francis Collins and his messaging about the federal government’s response to the Covid situation. Collins is a scientist, famous for his work on the human genome, a Darwinist, and one who claims to be born again. As Anthony Fauci’s boss and the head of the nation’s medical-grant agency since 2009, Dr. Collins has wielded considerable political power during the Covid crisis of the last two years.

His messaging on Covid has included advocacy for the experimental vaccines, and in February 2021, *Time Magazine* explained that federal authorities relied on Collins to communicate this message to the Bible-believing world. The message was simple – pastors must tell their congregations that submitting to mRNA vaccination is loving your neighbor, and that refusing to do so is a lack of love that will exacerbate the public health risk. Although the article mentions some refutation of this message, its primary focus is the way some evangelical leaders unquestioningly adopted and supported it as though it were ecclesial dogma.

The article documents that the views of Dr. Collins regarding the sanctity of human embryonic life and the nature of human sexuality have often departed from a true biblical anthropology. Perhaps it should be obvious that, for anyone to remain in a

position of bureaucratic power for over a decade in Washington, some accommodation of worldly philosophy is requisite. Collins supported Obama’s lifting the ban on the destruction of human embryos for research purposes. With critical-race-theory fluency, Collins implemented diversity tests as a part of the NIH’s grant-reviewal process. In addition, he has declared himself openly as an ally of the LGBTQ movement. Reflecting on these positions, the journalist asks in her article why evangelical leaders would identify Collins as “a follower of Jesus” – an important question indeed.

Clearly, the Daily Wire article highlights one of the challenges all churches face in these days of Covid fear – how to maintain a godly and consistent testimony before the world. These supporters of Francis Collins and his NIH vaccination message believed that embracing the mainstream position in a christianized way would further the cause of Christ through their ministries. Overlooking Collins’s shortcomings came naturally for those who wanted to associate with his reputation in the world as a well-respected scientist and as a brother-in-the-Lord with unusual political prestige.

But the article documents an unintended consequence of this approach. The problem with churches adopting and christianizing any popular message not found in Scripture is that our enemy often uses this effort as entrapment. Our true message of the sinner’s need for saving grace in Christ becomes associated with the world’s message from popular culture. When time exposes the falsehoods of formerly popular messages that later fall out of favor, the testimony of our gospel ministry can fall with them.

This fall can happen with extrabiblical messaging from either side of the Covid controversy, of course. Our true message is equally corruptible, whether in support of or in opposition to public policy. Whenever public policy requires churches to disobey Scripture, churches must oppose that policy. But even then, our discernment comes from the message of Scripture. More often, the trap high-

lighted by the article captures the unsuspecting. Ordinarily, the message of Scripture is simply not focused on the issues captivating the attention of popular culture. Under these conditions, those seeking a wide hearing become overly concerned about not being heard. And yet, “preach the word” is still our charge (Isa. 55:11, 2 Tim. 2:2-4).

The Bible does not mandate submission to an experimental vaccine, nor does it forbid the decision to participate in the experiment. In fact, it explains to us that believers will come to differing conclusions on issues like this precisely because they share the same love for the Lord (Rom. 14:6, “He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks”).

It is possible to participate in an experimental vaccination program out of love for the Lord, and it is also possible to decline participation out of the same love for the Lord. Where our testimony falls into the trap mentioned above is by forgetting the important questions Paul asks in verse 10: “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

The why-not to Paul’s question is clear. When we stand before the Bema of our Savior and give an accounting of the medical decisions we have made, it will matter little to us what influential scientists, churchmen, or journalists have said or written. It will matter, rather, what our Savior has said. It will matter whether we have obeyed the Word of God. It will matter whether we have sought the will of the Lord.

The Lord’s will and Word are clear on what matters most: “Let not then your good be evil spoken of; for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Rom. 14:16-19).

In the words of the Apostle Paul, “the kingdom of God is not” a vaccine. An ecclesiastical position on the acceptable level of personal health risk is not an edifying thing that makes for peace. Medical ethics teaches us that personal risk must always be faced with well-informed personal choice. The Scripture teaches us that the more we follow after peace and edification, the more we shall maintain a good testimony in days of Covid fear.

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## What Is Revival?

By Pastor Kevin Hobi

Before the IBFNA was a Fellowship, it was a call for revival. Our founders called themselves “Regular Baptists for Revival.” But what is revival? There are a couple of ways to answer that question.

One way is to explain what is happening in our church, where we are currently experiencing revival. Jonathan Edwards did this in a commencement address he delivered to the faculty and students of Yale University in September of 1741. It was titled, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, Applied to that Uncommon Operation that Has Lately Appeared on the Minds of the People of New England: with a Particular Consideration of the Extraordinary Circumstances with which This Work Is Attended.*

Jonathan Edwards was the pastor of The Church of Christ at Northampton, MA. Northampton had existed for just over 80 years. Edwards succeeded his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who had pastored the flock of God there for nearly 60 of those 80 years. This church had experienced a revival in response to a series of sermons Edwards preached on justification by faith in 1734-35. The pastor was 31 years old and had become the pastor five years earlier at the age of 26.

In the early 1740s, revival had come again to New England, and Edwards had come to New Haven to explain and even defend what was happening. When his *Distinguishing Marks* address was

published, it included a "Preface to the Reader" written by a Pastor William Cooper, a "colleague pastor" or associate pastor of The Brattle Street Church in Boston. His church also had experienced revival. He once declared about this time that more "people . . . in concern about their souls" had come to him in one week than had come to him in his preceding twenty-four years of ministry.

Pastor Cooper describes the fitness of Jonathan Edwards to the task of explaining what revival is: "The Reverend Author is known to be 'a scribe instructed unto the kingdom of heaven;' the place where he has been called to exercise his ministry has been famous for experimental religion; and he has had opportunities to observe this work in many places where it has powerfully appeared, and to converse with numbers that have been the subjects of it. These things qualify him for this undertaking above most."

It is likely that we cannot speak about the revival in our church the way Pastor Edwards could, but I want us to take comfort in something that Edwards wrote in his explanation of revival: "My design therefore at this time is to show what are the true, certain, and distinguishing evidences of a work of the Spirit of God, by which we may safely proceed in judging of any operation we find in ourselves, or see in others. And here I would observe, that we are to take the Scriptures as our guide in such cases." Edwards points his readers to 1 John 4.

We may not be able to explain what revival is by giving an account of our personal ministry experience, but we can do what Edwards says to do. We can take the Scriptures as our guide in this case. As we do so in answer to the question, "What is revival?", I want us to see what I am going to call four classrooms in Scripture's schoolhouse of revival, where we will learn together what revival is from the Word of God. Scripture's schoolhouse of revival includes an English class, an Art class, a Math class, and finally a Science class.

### English Class – The Meaning of *Revival*

Our English word simply comes from the Latin *vivo* meaning *to live* and the prefix *re-* meaning *again*. So, *revive* means *to live again*. Noah Webster, whose 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* was published just as our nation's Second

Great Awakening was ending, includes this definition for the noun *revival*: "Renewed and more active attention to religion; an awakening of men to their spiritual concerns."

Our New Testaments were originally written in Greek, and there is a parallel Greek word that is used there. It is *anazao*. *Zao* means *I live* and *ana-* means *again*. Both *anazao* and *revive* mean *to live again*. The Greek word is used five times in the New Testament evidence.

Two usages are in a passage that applies directly to the answer to our question about what revival is. It is used by the Lord Jesus in His parable about the prodigal son (Luke 15). You will remember the story. A younger son has greedily demanded his inheritance from a loving father prematurely, and upon receiving it he wastes it all on riotous living (v. 13). Starving with less food than the pigs he fed, the younger son returns to the loving arms of his father, who exclaims, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (v. 24). He repeats his description of this happy turn of events in verse 32.

So, our vocabulary lesson on the word *revival* has taught us that there is a kind of power available to spiritually dead people that can make them live again. Prodigals, who are greedy, riotous, wasteful, selfish, and destitute, can find forgiveness in the love of a once-betrayed Father. Revival is the power of God's love for sinners and of His joy at their repentance, which is able to make them live again (Luke 15:1-2, 10).

### Art Class – Scripture's Pictures of Revival

Another close parallel to the word *revival* in Scripture is the word *regeneration*. *Regenerate* means *to give-birth again*. The passage where we learn the most about being born again is John 3, where Jesus told the Jewish religious leader Nicodemus, "You must be born again" (v. 7).

When Nicodemus asked what this means, Jesus marveled that he was a teacher of the Old Testament and had to ask that question. In his answer to Nicodemus, Jesus pointed to two pictures of regeneration or revival we find in the Old Testament – being born of water and being born of the Spirit or the wind.

Take these two in reverse order. We find the wind picturing revival in Ezek. 37:1-14. The prophet describes the ultimate salvation of the nation of Israel in terms of the power of wind, breath, and Spirit. Jesus told Nicodemus that the wind blows when people are born again, just like it shall when Israel is resurrected.

The second OT picture of regeneration that Jesus refers to is water. Water is a picture of living again in the form of rain showers as well as dew. Ezek. 34:26 promises “there shall be showers of blessing” in Israel’s future when the Lord makes the nation spiritually alive again. Psalm 133 speaks of the Lord’s commanding the blessing of eternal life in terms of a refreshing dew. The oil of this Psalm again reminds us that it is work of God’s Spirit, and the Psalm also teaches us that this blessed dew looks for a place where brethren are dwelling together in unity.

#### Math Class – The Numbers of Revival

The Book of Acts indicates that the numbers of revival are significant. In the early church, God’s Word multiplied, disciples multiplied, and local churches multiplied (Acts 6:1, 7; 9:31; 12:24).

I mentioned earlier that Jonathan Edwards’s church first experienced revival in 1734-35. In 1736 he published an account of these blessings titled, *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages*. That phrase *many hundreds of souls* is striking because Northampton was a town of only 200 families then.

#### Science Class – The Marks of Revival

Having opened his Bible to 1 John 4, Edwards explained to the students at Yale that there are five observable marks of true revival.

1. True revival raises the esteem of people for Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3, 15). Edwards said: “This implies a confessing not only that there was such a person who appeared in Palestine and did and suffered those things that are recorded of him, but that he was Christ, i.e., the Son of God, anointed to be Lord and Savior, as the name Jesus Christ implies.”

2. True revival diminishes the hold of Satan’s kingdom on the lives of people (1 John 4:4-5). Ed-

wards said: “The influence of the Spirit of God is yet more abundantly manifest, if persons have their hearts drawn off from the world, and weaned from the objects of their worldly lusts, and taken off from worldly pursuits, by the sense that they have of the excellency of divine things, and the affection they have to those spiritual enjoyments of another world, that are promised in the gospel.”

3. True revival causes people to love and trust the Holy Scriptures (1 John 4:6a). Edwards said: “The apostle’s argument here equally reaches all that in the same sense are of God; that is, all those that God has appointed and inspired to deliver to his church its rule of faith and practice; all the prophets and apostles, whose doctrine God has made the foundation on which he has built his church, as in Eph. 2:20; in a word, all the penmen of the Holy Scriptures.”

4. True revival causes people to love truth and reject error (1 John 4:6b). Edwards said: “Whatever spirit removes our darkness, and brings us to the light, undeceives us, and, by convincing us of the truth, doth us a kindness. If I am brought to a sight of truth, and am made sensible of things as they really are, my duty is immediately to thank God for it.”

5. True revival causes people to love God and the brethren (1 John 4:7-8). Edwards said: “The surest character of true divine supernatural love—distinguishing it from counterfeits that arise from a natural self-love—is, that the Christian virtue of humility shines in it; that which above all others renounces, abases, and annihilates what we term self.”

The schoolhouse of Scripture teaches us what revival is, although we have seen little of it in our day. Revival is a work of the Holy Spirit by which He causes dead and dying souls to live again spiritually, expressing the Father’s love for sinners and His joy in their salvation, blowing powerfully like wind and descending refreshingly like rain, multiplying the Word of God, disciples of Christ, and local churches, and marking these multiplied disciples and churches with the exaltation of Jesus Christ, lastingly changed lives, hunger for their Bibles, a commitment to truth over falsehood, and a selfless love for God and the brethren. This is God’s mighty work of revival.

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