



# IBFNA

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# THE REVIEW

## On Our Knees in 2023

By Pastor Mark Strangman, Moderator IBFNA

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph. 6:18). You are a soldier in the army of the Lord. I am sure you remember this classic children's song: “I may never march in the infantry, ride in the cavalry, shoot the artillery; I may never zoom o'er the enemy, but I'm in the Lord's army! (Yes Sir!).”

What wonderful truth that simple song portrays! As Paul told us: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph. 6:12). We are all soldiers “in the Lord's army.”

You are completely battle-ready at all times, because you are firmly secured in the belt of the Lord's truth. You have been justified, so you wear as a permanent breastplate the righteousness of the Lord. And you are firmly standing ready on the good news of the gospel. Along with these you go into the battle wearing the helmet of absolute trust in the salvation given to you, clutching the shield of faith in that salvation, and faithfully wielding the sword of the Spirit – the Word of God.

The imagery that the Lord provides for us in Ephesians 6 is clear. We are commanded to be strong in the Lord's mighty power and to stand, having taken up the armor of the Lord. But we also must understand that there is one final step to the marching orders the Lord has given us. We will never stand in the evil day if we do not complete His orders, which equip us for battle-readiness for Him. We must fall to our knees in order to stand for the Lord.

At first, this might seem like a paradox. How can I stand if I am on my knees? But please understand that this completing instruction must be done “in the Spirit.” Paul utilizes a spiritual concept and speaks of our absolute dependence on the Spirit's leading. As we consider our need to fight the battle for the Lord on our knees, consider two points we see in this passage. First of all are the conditions of our battle-praying.

### The Conditions of Prayer

Prayer is to be continuous. Eph. 6:18: “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication



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for all saints." We must pray always. 1 Thess. 5:17 tells us to "pray without ceasing." This word, meaning *uninterruptedly, without omission*, is right in line with Paul's instruction to "watch thereunto with all perseverance." We are to bring everything before the Lord in prayer, without exception. This is what it means to be people of prayer.

To be continually in prayer we must understand the personal challenge prayer brings us. In order to pray continuously (1) we must keep communication open between ourselves and the Lord at all times by living a holy life in His righteousness and to His pleasing. (2) We must be ready to pray at any time. This should be our foremost response to everything. Do we immediately fall to our knees before the Lord for every need, no matter how great or small? (3) We must completely trust the Lord as we cast every care upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7). This leads to a thankful, worry-free heart and mind, which is stayed on the Lord and dwelling in His perfect peace (Isa. 26:3; Phil. 4:4-7).

Albert Barnes (*Barnes NT Commentary*) says this about our perseverance in prayer: "Watching for opportunities to pray; watching for the spirit of prayer; watching against all those things which would hinder prayer, with all perseverance, never becoming discouraged and disheartened."

Prayer is also to be personal. The Philippians were to pray with all prayer (personal adoration and testimony to the Lord) and supplication (entreaties, personal needs) in their own relationship to the Lord. He also instructs them to bring supplications before the Lord for all saints. He then concludes the instruction by giving them his own personal prayer requests to lift to the Lord for him. Prayer is to be personal and persevering. "The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jam. 5:16).

### The Confidence of Prayer

Our battle-readiness for the Lord through prayer includes the assurance and confidence it affords us as we fight the Lord's battle on our knees. Consider some points about this confidence the Lord provides.

**The Person of Prayer.** Paul states that we are to pray "in the Spirit." This is an anarthrous noun (having no definite article). The context certainly mentions the Spirit's ministry, but we also understand that the condition of our own spirit is vital. The Holy Spirit is the one who intercedes for us (Rom. 8:26-27), and it is His power we are utilizing in the battle. But the focus here is also on the quality of our spiritual life. This is a spiritual battle, and we fight through our spiritual ministry. We must be spiritually in tune with the Lord.

**The People of Prayer.** Scripture gives us many examples of the people of God falling to their knees before the Lord. Daniel consistently came before the Lord on his knees (Dan. 6:10). Peter fell before the Lord and declared that he was "a sinful man" (Luke 5:8). John fell before the Lord Jesus Christ as he witnessed Him in His glory (Rev. 1:17). Ezra tells us he arose from his heaviness (due to the sin of the people) and fell to his knees before the Lord (Ezra 9:3-5). Paul bowed his knee to the Lord for the Ephesians (Eph. 3:14). One day every knee will bow and every tongue will confess the supreme lordship and sovereignty of our Savior (Isa. 45:22-23; Phil. 2:10-11).

**The Posture of Prayer.** As we consider the confidence of prayer, the humility of falling to our knees in the midst of warfare is a great example. We do not fall before our enemy in submission and defeat. We fall before the Lord in complete security and victorious assurance.

Think of the message of our posture in prayer. (1) It demonstrates our humility. "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up" (Jam. 4:10). (2) It demonstrates our faith. Nothing can display our trust more than bending our knees. This is the position of walking by faith, not by sight. Were it not for the mighty power of God, we would be in a deadly, vulnerable position. But as David proclaimed as he met Goliath head on, "The battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47). (3) It demonstrates our dependence. It is the Lord's strength that flows through us as Paul commands us to "be strong in the Lord." It also shows that we trust the Lord to supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:19).

How is your battle-readiness? Are you trying to fight for the Lord through your own strength, or have you fallen to your knees, leaving the battle to Him? May each of us make a commitment to the

Lord this year to fight all our battles for the Lord on our knees. Thank you for your prayers for our Fellowship, and may God richly bless the IBFNA.

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## Me and Our Church's Next Revival

Pastor Kevin Hobi

I must be honest that preaching on revival was at first an intimidating one for me. When my pastor friend first asked me to give six messages on the topic, he was asking a pastor who only has a few more members than that in his church.

As exciting as the study of revival can be, and my heart was intensely encouraged by this opportunity from the Lord, when we look around at our churches, our state, our region, and our nation, we can find ourselves lamenting with McCheyne when he preached his message, "Why Is God a Stranger in the Land?"

So, I have not tried to write about what I know from personal experience about revival. My goal has been instead to share with you what I have discovered from Scripture and church history about this work of God.

You may remember that we defined revival as 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.

I cannot explain to you how I have experienced seeing this work of God become a reality in my church, in my town, in my state, or in my nation, but I can tell you from personal experience about the times that this work of God has happened to me as an individual.

One of the takeaways I found in my preparation for these articles was this: each of us has an opportunity to do something about our own personal revival today, which may not be as open to us in the same way when it comes to a church-wide revival or a nation-wide great awakening. This study has taught me that before the Lord I am less responsible for these other revivals than I am for a Kevin-Hobi great awakening.

C. H. Spurgeon spoke of this truth in his sermon, "Spiritual Revival—The Need of the Church": "In this matter, we should begin at home. We too often flog the Church when the whip should be laid on our own shoulders. We drag the Church, like a colossal culprit, to the altar. We bind her hands fast and try to execute her at once, or, at least, we find fault with her where there is none and magnify her little errors, while we too often forget our own imperfections. Let us, therefore, commence with ourselves, remembering that we are a part of the Church and that our own need of revival is, in some measure, the cause of that need in the Church at large."

And so with this last article of this series on revival, I want each of us to focus on our own potential for revival as an individual child of God and member of Christ's church. When it comes to the possibility of the revival of my heart, with man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. When God revives my heart, it will bring surprising changes, and it will come through the effect that revival's preaching, praying, and love have on my life. It will come in answer to Habakkuk's prayer made my own: "Oh Lord, revive your work!" (3:2), coupled with the plea, "Begin that work in me."

In Romans 1 Paul describes the world in which he lived and ministered as a world in great need of revival, a world very much like the one we find ourselves living in today (vv. 18-32). This passage is a description of the opposite of revival. Theologians call it *reprobation* (v. 28), and it is God's judicial work of hardening through giving people over to great success in the pursuit of their pleasurable self-destruction. Our nation is experiencing reprobation, not revival.

So Paul's gospel ministry confronted the same kind of world ours does today, and his example tells each of us what we can do as individuals when it comes to encouraging the return of revival to a world like ours. Three opportunities present themselves to each of us in this context.

#### Separated Unto the Gospel (vv. 1-6).

Each of us can be determined to become separated unto the gospel in a world like ours. Our mission as believers in this world is often described in athletic terms in the Scripture. Certainly, in order to play athletics at a high level in our society today, great giftedness has to be coupled with great dedication, focus, and hard work.

I have a pastor friend whose son plays defensive end in college football. My friend told me once that recruiters told his son in high school that he needed to stop playing basketball so he could gain more weight to get ready for college football. Athletes who want to perform at this level have to be willing to sacrifice other pleasures and separate themselves with focus to this one goal.

The Apostle Paul felt that way first and foremost about the gospel (v. 1). It is easy to see how this was true in Paul's case. Scripture speaks of his being separated from his mother's womb for the gospel in Gal. 1:15, of his being separated at the moment of his salvation on the Damascus road for the gospel in Acts 9:15, and of his being separated by the Holy Spirit for gospel ministry with Barnabas when he was sent out by the church of Antioch in Acts 13:2.

We would all agree that it is right and proper to view Paul's life as separated to the gospel. God called him to be an apostle after all. But did you

notice what Paul says about all of the believers in the church at Rome in verse 6? He says, "ye also are the called." In verse 1 he says he was called. And in verse 6, he says that every believer in the church of Rome was called in some way too.

So, the first thing you and I can do as individuals, when it comes to our world's need for revival, is to look at our lives, our time, our talents, and our treasure as though they exist for the singular purpose of furthering of the gospel. To do so is to become separated unto the gospel of God. Each of us have this calling.

We need to view our relationship to the ministry of the gospel the way a college football player has to view his relationship to football. Whatever our vocation, each of us can make the decision that we are going to accept the calling to be separated unto the gospel in order to address the need for revival in our world today. Is that a decision that you have made? Could you honestly describe yourself as separated to the gospel?

#### Love for the Local Church (vv. 7-15).

A second thing each of us can do for the cause of revival in a world like ours is to determine to love our local church. I would like to refer back to Ebenezer Porter's Andover lectures on revival in 1832 after the Second Great Awakening. He mentions the primacy of the local church in God's work of revival: "Any system of means for the promotion of religion which will supersede or essentially impair the influence of a regular, local ministry, must ultimately be deleterious to the church" [*Letters On Revival*, 91].

"For any institution that is plainly of divine appointment there can be no proper substitute. Any human arrangement, for example, that supersedes the Christian Sabbath, or that prevents the regular worship of local churches, or the regular influence of local ministers, on that day, is an assumption that we are wiser than God" [95].

Asahel Nettleton was the George Whitfield of his day. His leadership gave the Second Great Awakening a stable endurance that was not enjoyed as well in the First. Porter explains the difference in terms of Nettleton's commitment to the

primacy of the local church: "This distinguished itinerant found no difficulty to labour as an assistant of stated pastor, without making himself their rival. If in any instance he could not conscientiously coincide in the views, or cooperate in the measures, of a pastor among whose charge he was invited to labour, he did not sow dissension in that church, nor seek to detach their affections from their minister; but quietly withdrew to another place" [94].

Paul never sought gospel ministry that left New Testament local churches behind or that rivaled their ministry. He longs to be with them. It is his purpose to impart his gifts to them and to receive theirs from them. He wants to have a fruitful gospel ministry among them.

And Porter also recognized in his description of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening that one cannot properly love local churches without a fervent love for the pastors of those churches. He writes that revival happens in a place "where many an anxious sinner has valued beyond all price the privilege of opening his heart in private to a beloved pastor.

"No organization, though devised by God himself, can be expected to operate in our depraved world, without some difficulties. . . . But that will be a day of calamity to our churches, should such a day come, when they shall be willing to exchange a stated pastorate for itinerant and occasional ministrations" [92]. In our day, most of those "itinerant and occasional" substitutions for pastors in the lives of believers are found online or on the radio. Ravi Zacharias comes to mind as a recent tragic example.

When it comes to the revival of our own heart, we can determine to love our local church and her pastor(s). Do we possess this love?

Not Ashamed (vv. 16-17).

A third opportunity we have to encourage revival in a world like ours comes from Paul's bold declaration, "For I am not ashamed."

On February 16, 2021, Pastor James Coates of Gracelife Church in Edmonton, Alberta was incarcerated by civil authorities. James's crime was his

church attendance. As a matter of conscience, James believes that in-person church attendance is necessary for the believer, not optional. I happen to agree with my brother on that score (Heb. 10:21-26). There is no pandemic-related exception clause to our nation's Bill of Rights, nor is there one to be found in Hebrews 10.

This conviction put James in conflict with a Canadian bureaucracy's mandate that limited churches to 15% of their building capacity in their effort to battle the Corona virus. James's wife's name is Erin, and they have been blessed with two boys, one 18 years-old at the time, and the other 11. James spent a month and six days incarcerated in a Canadian prison for his stand.

In Acts 23 the Apostle Paul explained to the Jewish Sanhedrin of his day that one of the non-negotiables of his ministry was that he had lived with a clear conscience before God (v. 1). Paul's explanation earned him a swift punch in the mouth.

James Coates was held in jail for over a month in order to maintain a clear conscience before God. A simple slap in the face would have been easier than that month away from his family and ministry. Whatever you may think about in-person worship in times of pandemic caution, the facts of this case are clear that a brother spent time in jail in a Western democracy for obeying his conscience, for seeking to do what Paul said was a non-negotiable for his ministry - to live with a clear conscience before his God.

And so, we sense that we are getting closer to the kind of world in which Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." Are you ashamed of Christ? Are you ashamed of His gospel? Are you ashamed of your local church? Are you ashamed of believers determined to follow their conscience? If so, who is shaming you? Is it not the enemy of the Lord and His work?

One thing we can determine to do in the face of our need for revival is to not be ashamed of the gospel, to believe that it is still the power of God unto salvation, and to speak up for truth as it is being trampled in our streets. You can determine to obey God with a clear conscience, and to stand

with all those who are sincerely seeking to do the same in the face of governmental persecution.

For who knows what the Lord might begin to do with one or two church members, who see their lives as separated unto God's gospel ministry, who love their local church fervently and selflessly, and who are not ashamed of the gospel, come what may?

Ours is a time and place like Paul's Rome, a time and place more acquainted with reprobation than with revival. Most days of ministry are like our day. Jonathan's day was like that. Saul had been beaten by the Philistines, Israel's army was

on the run, and Jonathan turned to his armor bearer and reminded him: "God is not restrained whether to save by many or by few." Jonathan's unrestrained God is our God, the God of revival. To whom might we turn and tell this truth?—"God is not restrained to save by many or by few. Let's give our life to this fight."

It will have to be someone like Paul, who said of the difficulties of the battle: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life as dear to myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).

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## Hindrances to Revival

Pastor Kevin Hobi

The book of Acts is the history of the birth of the church. It contains many accounts of God's work of revival. Through the faithful ministry of the apostles and the mighty work of God's Spirit, the Word of God multiplied, disciples multiplied, and churches multiplied.

The end of the book, however, reminds us that not everyone took part in this blessing (Acts 28:23-31). Referencing an Old Testament passage, which is one of the most often quoted by New Testament authors, Luke finishes his history with Isaiah's prophecy about thick hearts, dull ears, and closed eyes. These are the hindrances to revival. At times our Lord will not do mighty works in the face of hard-hearted unbelief (Matt. 13:57-58).

Sadly, the Scriptures indicate that no study of revival is complete without consideration given to the hindrances of revival. Three hindrances to revival must be noted.

### The Hindrance of Impurity

In Mark 8:15, Jesus give his disciples a twofold warning. He calls the first danger "leaven of the Pharisees" and the second "leaven of Herod." Since the days of the first Passover, leaven was a component to be avoided during one of Israel's

holiest celebrations of the year, the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During the feast leaven symbolized contamination and impurity. Though the distracted disciples began thinking immediately about physical bread and their hunger pangs, Jesus makes clear that he spoke to warn them about the doctrine and practice of two damaging contaminants of the work of the Lord (Matt. 16:12).

Hypocrisy made the doctrine and practice of the Pharisees especially contaminating (Luke 12:1). They seemed right on the outside, but inwardly they were full of "ravening and wickedness." Accepted by public opinion as the trustees of historic Judaism, they were in fact religious leaders who loved not God and sought to destroy His Christ (vv. 42, 53-54). This form of impurity was a false form of Judaism. False forms of Christianity are no better in our day.

What is called *the leaven of Herod* in Mark is labeled *the leaven of the Sadducees* in Matthew (16:6). The warning of the Lord for us, then, concerns the nexus between Sadducee and Herod. It is this nexus that is the doctrine and practice, their leaven, which can contaminate the work of the Lord. It was the Sadducees who said nothing new when they cried out to Pilate for the execution of their

Messiah, "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15). This form of impurity infects the work of the ministry through a lust for political influence and protection.

In summary, then, Jesus warns His disciples against the dual danger of false religion on the one hand and the lust for political power on the other. In regard to each, churches have heeded these warnings poorly in our day of increasing reprobation. Billy Graham's compromise with false religion contaminated his work and ours, and practitioners of cobelligerent compromise for political influence have done more to corrupt the gospel than to bring revival's change. We must never seek revival through religious compromise or politics.

### The Hindrance of Disunity

Although "Unity!" is often the battle-cry of contaminating impurity, disunity nevertheless will hinder revival equally effectively. In the next chapter in Mark's Gospel, the Evangelist tells us the story of the Apostle John's mistaken zeal for purity: "And John answered him saying, 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and he followeth not us; and we forbid him, because he followeth not us'" (Mark 9:38).

Ironically, John had forgotten that, earlier in the chapter, those who were members of the apostles' party had considerable trouble casting out a demon from a young boy (v. 18). Still, John felt compelled to forbid the continuance of the effective ministry of a fellow disciple of Christ for

one reason: "he followeth not us." John's pursuit of purity had become a promotion of partisanship.

Some of God's greatest servants have been "sons of thunder" like John and his older brother James. On another occasion, some Samaritans failed to welcome their ministry, and James and John volunteered to call fire down from heaven on their village in return (Luke 9:54).

Jesus "turned, and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them'" (vv. 55-56). Whatever our personal disposition, our pursuit of purity must always be a desire to save men, not to destroy them. Abraham Lincoln's approach will help, who said: "I don't like that man; I must get to know him better."

### The Hindrance of Counterfeiting

The early church confronted counterfeit revivals. Simon became known as "the great power of God" for a time (Acts 8:9-13, 18-24). His fascination with the signs and wonders wrought by Philip and the apostles is telling (v. 13).

Books have been written about the Simons of our day (see Hank Hanegraaff's *Counterfeit Revival*). Charismaticism and the worldly sounds of the Jesus Movement have swept over our churches as we have plunged into reprobation. True revival comes through revival's preaching, prayer, and love. A return to cessationism and unifying godly music is an important precursor for revival today.

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