

GOD BLESS AMERICA? PART TWO¹

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Will God again bless America? This presents a possibility and a problem. The possibility is that God may not bless America, but the opposite. Judgment is a more realistic possibility. Then there is the problem of the Church. Is she, or can she become, an instrument of blessing? Where do God, the Bible, and the Church fit in the future of America?

I. THE POSSIBILITY OF GOD NOT BLESSING AMERICA.

Certain basic facts must be considered when it come to the reality of sin, whether in our lives or in the world.

1. God will judge sin in the world.

In praying for God to bless America we must also face the fact that nations can go so far in sin that even a revival will not save them. This was true of Judah in its last revival under Josiah. Read 2 Chron. 34:24-28. This is true because there is no repentance. James R. White expressed this pointedly in an internet article entitled, "God Bless America (but don't tell us to repent)." Here is a sample:

Is America so arrogant, so utterly self-absorbed, so diseased by religious liberalism and philosophical subjectivism, that she thinks she can ignore all of history itself and demand from God a blessing when she refuses to repent of her evils? Do we really need to be reminded that Planned Parenthood has killed more little children in our land in the week since the [9/11] attacks than died in the attacks themselves? Are we so blind?

Surely the scourge of abortion would be enough to warrant the unleashing of the wrath of God, but there is so much more! We are a nation on a crusade—a crusade to wipe from our history books every vestige of our former religious past. The religion of scientism, with its chief idol in the person of Darwin, has become enshrined in our very governmental policies. There is no creator, we are told, to express His law for us in the first place. We want to banish God and His law from our courtrooms, our schools, our every public institution. If God says it is wrong, we celebrate it. Every form of sexual debauchery is found in the land. The airways are filled with programs that exalt fornication and adultery. Major film stars are lauded for the most sinful lifestyles. Homosexuality is not only turned into an acceptable "lifestyle," it is made a political right, a political force, a test-case for being properly "tolerant." The list goes on and on and on. . . .²

The religious fervor after 9/11 abated quickly. There was certainly no evidence of any national repentance. Any mention publicly of the need for repentance has been met with scorn and accusations of bigotry and lack of patriotism. I am not a prophet with insights into God's timetable for America, but the prospects must be considered that God may not bless America with spiritual awakening.

“God *spared not* the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell” (2 Pet. 2:4), and “*spared not* the old world . . . bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly. . . turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:5-6), and “if God *spared not* the natural branches [Israel], take heed that he *spare not* thee [Gentiles]” (Rom. 11:21). Above all this “He *spared not* his own Son, but delivered him up for us all”(Rom. 8:32). God is so holy that He didn’t even spare His own Son when the sins of His people were laid upon Him. Do you think He will spare you, my friend, if you die in your sins, never having been forgiven through Christ’s substitutionary cross work? Do we think He will spare America, if there is no repentance?

2. God is in control over this sinful world.

Where does the Church fits in the dynamics of good and evil in society? First, the Church acts like light and salt (Matthew 5:13-16) on the world around it, being an illuminating and preserving force. We see this principle in Genesis 18 and 19 with respect to righteous people and wicked Sodom. Ten righteous people would have saved Sodom from destruction.

A second factor is the restraining effect of common grace in society. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2 of the mystery of iniquity that is at work, preparing the way for the coming Man of Sin, the Antichrist. He reveals that there is a restrainer that is holding him from being manifested.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth [Old English, restrains] will let [restrain], until he be taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:7).

Who or what is the restrainer? Some commentators see it as the Roman government, others of human government in general, and others see the “he” as God, particularly, the Holy Spirit in the Church. I lean toward the latter view. Nevertheless, it is evident that God is restraining evil in the world in any view (Ps. 76:10).

The third factor is the power of Satan over the world system (1 John 5:19; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12). The second factor, our sovereign God’s control, is always in effect and constant. The first and third vary in relation to each other. The basic variable is the Church.

There are thus upper and lower limits in the dynamic of evil in the world. The upper limit is that no matter how small and weak the Church may be, Satan will be kept from full control. The lower limit is that no matter how large and spiritually strong the Church may be, it will always be in the midst of a pluralistic society and a corrupt world system. Therefore, the Christian can have an optimistic outlook no matter what may come out of this whole terrorist threatened world or any other for that matter. May we pray for reformation and revival in the Church that we may be faithful no matter what the future holds!

II. THE PROBLEM FOR GOD BLESSING THE CHURCH.

1. Reality and Revival.

If the church is the key to this nation's blessing, the prospect doesn't look too bright. Much talk of revival is really effort to promote revivalism,³ the belief that revival can be promoted by meeting certain conditions. Though there are encouraging signs in places, there is no general burden for revival. Either we do not think we need it or believe that we are experiencing it already. Over the years we've tried one "gimmick" after another to bring people into our fundamental churches, with some show of success for a while, but then afterward needing a new one to keep the program going. The Church Growth Movement and its latest product, the market driven "seeker friendly" church, have promised much, but the numbers show they are not really making any headway. We're only swapping members from smaller churches to the megachurches.⁴ We have reports of miracle revivals and "moves of God" trumpeted over the land, especially on our TVs, yet a reading of Edwards' *Religious Affections* would show that you can have all these things without the Holy Spirit being anywhere around.⁵ Do we really want a "revival" of "more of the same"?

When the facts are examined in terms of value issues, there is not much difference statistically between the evangelical church and the society around us. The divorce rate is about the same and so is the percentage of abortions. Veith demonstrates how postmodern thinking and behavior have infiltrated the Church:

Moreover, the poll goes on to show that 53 percent of those who call themselves evangelical Christians believe that there are no absolutes. This means that the majority of those who say that they believe in the authority of the Bible and know Christ as their Savior nevertheless agree that "there is no such thing as absolute truth." Not Christ? No, although He presumably "works for them." Not the Bible? Apparently not, although 88 percent of evangelicals believe that "The Bible is the written word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches."⁶

Wait a minute! 53 percent of evangelicals say there are no absolutes, yet 88 percent profess to believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God? That doesn't compute! Such confusion really says many really do not believe in absolute truth. It testifies to the lack of and poor Bible preaching and teaching in the churches. It reflects the anti-intellectualism of our postmodern day that has infiltrated the church. People appear to have checked their brains at the door of the church and entered in to the therapeutic meet-felt-needs, entertaining, experience centered service on Sunday and on Monday go out unprepared to meet the antichrist worldview that envelops them. This is why they can hold to creation on Sunday and evolution on Monday without having any conflict in their mind. Biblical doctrine has had no affect on their worldview thinking. It's what sociologists call the public/private split, or what Francis Schaeffer called the "two realm theory of truth." We have been taught to put personal feelings and preferences, such as our faith, on an upper story and on a lower story reason, science and everyday practical living.⁷ No, the Bible is to be taught and lived out in everyday life, confronting the culture with a witness to Christ.

This uncertainty about absolute truth inevitably leads to relativism concerning moral matters:

These moral inversions are taking place not only in the secular world, but within what passes as Christendom. A recent study claimed that 56 percent of single “fundamentalists” engage in sex outside of marriage. This is about the same as the rate for “liberals” (57 percent).⁸

What has caused such a startling state of affairs? The evangelical church has imbibed the spirit of the age. The Bible believing (?) church has taken on a distinctly American psyche that values pragmatic practices that produce results above faithfulness to scriptural principles and fruit that abides.⁹

2. Regeneration and Revival.

This has produced churches filled with unconverted members. Just as there came a generation after Joshua’s, “which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Jud. 2:10), so we have multitudes on our fundamental/evangelical church rolls who give no evidence of being born again. How can we make such a judgment? “By their fruits [or lack thereof] ye shall know them.” The statistics of the largest evangelical denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, reveal that only 30 percent of the total membership attend church on any given Sunday morning.¹⁰ Not meaning to pick on the Southern Baptists, it is equally true of other groups. Among Independent Baptists we can point out the phenomenon of a church with 10,000 members but an auditorium built to seat 5,000. This is common, though the numbers may differ. It is evident they do not expect to have all their members attend at one time on any given Sunday. Our word “church” translates the word *ekklesia*, which means “an assembly.” Can we say people who do not assemble really belong to the “Assembly”? We’re not talking about shut-ins and work schedules, and such, but of people who profess to be “born again,” but have no heart for God, His Word, His worship, His holiness, or His people. They say they are “saved” but their lives do not manifest that they have been “saved” from anything, especially sin.

But more tragic is the presence of multitudes in our churches who do come (at least on Sunday morning), who must be fed “*the leeks and garlic of Egypt*” to keep them, because they have no appetite for “*the true Manna*.” They must be entertained to make them feel good, rather than exercised and edified by expository Bible preaching and teaching of sound theology. The crowd must be gained and kept by making the church’s programs, music, and message as close to the world as possible. Or the crowds must be gained and kept by signs and wonders, prophecies and productions, exorcisms and experiences.¹¹

What a contrast to Jesus, who lost His crowd when He refused to appeal to the food seekers (John 6:26-27), work seekers (6:28-29), and sign seekers (6:30-33). After making it plain that He was not going to be a king, who would feed them with bread like Moses of old, He preached that they were totally unable to come to Him without an effectual work of sovereign grace (6:37-45, 65), and that they had to have a personal, vital, faith relationship with him, likened to “eating his flesh and drinking his blood,” to have eternal life (6:46-58). The result was that “from that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (6:66). Yes, Jesus lost His crowd! When He turned to His Twelve and asked them if they wanted to go away too, Peter

responded: “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). True disciples have no alternative to Christ and His Word.

It is interesting that a George Gallup poll in 1993 revealed that 32% of adult Americans claimed to be evangelical, but when certain simple questions were added to ascertain their understanding and commitment to their faith, the number dropped significantly (to 8 %).¹²

David Wells cuts this percentage down considerably more:

And if we were to probe just a little bit more, and if we were to ask: first, “Are you regenerate?” second, “Do you have a sufficiently cogent worldview to make a difference in society?” and third, “Do you have a sufficiently formed Christian character to want to do so?” based on some ongoing research I have seen, my guess is that the figure may be no more than 1% or 2%. What this means, my brothers and sisters, is that we may have been living in a fool’s paradise. When Gallup produced his figures in the 1970s, and has repeated them every year ever since, it seemed like the evangelicals were on a roll with such wide popular support and with churches that were growing. It looked as though we were on the verge of sweeping all of our religious and cultural opponents before us. That is why these figures stirred such alarm in the secular media, why they created some heartburn in the mainline Protestant denominations, and why they produced just a little power-mongering among evangelicals. But it turned out to be an optical illusion. The reality that we have to face today is that we have produced a plague of nominal evangelicalism which is trite and as superficial as we have seen in Catholic Europe.¹³

3. Reformation and Revival.

How did this crowd get into our churches? They were preached in with a perverted, powerless gospel. Or they have grown up as second generation, or more, nominal Christians in churches that have maintained the status quo of being Bible believing without any longer knowing what it is to experience vital worship of the triune God, genuine spiritual community as a body of Christ, and compassion and vision for a lost world. Remember, Paul warned of “perilous times” to come in which men would be committing the most wicked sins (2 Tim. 3:1-4), and stated that the whole crowd would go to church, “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (v. 5).

The need of the day is not just revival, but reformation! Historically, the Reformation of the sixteenth century brought the revivals and evangelical awakenings of the following centuries. The contemporary church of our day would not know what to do with a true revival. Without reformation any revival God would send would be dissipated. We repeat, the need is for reformation and revival. What is reformation? Tom Nettles defines it:

Reformation is the recovery of biblical truth that leads to the purifying of one’s theology. It involves a discovery of the Bible as the judge and guide of all thought and action; corrects errors in interpretation; gives precision, coherence, and courage to doctrinal confession; and gives form and energy to the corporate worship of the triune God. Though it should be an

ongoing enterprise in all churches and in the Body of Christ throughout the world, the most poignant displays of reformation come at times of great theological, moral, spiritual, and ecclesiastical declension in the church.¹⁴

We are living in such a time; reformation is essential. What is revival in the light of reformation? Hear Nettles again:

Revival is the application of Reformation truth to human experience. It occurs one person at a time and may appear in individuals who thereby become somewhat isolated from the more general apathy around them; or it may appear on a relatively massive scale radically altering the spiritual face of an entire church, community, or even nation. Normally, therefore, revival involves three things: the essence of Reformation doctrine either preached, read, or otherwise known; the experiential application of that doctrine accompanied by loving but careful investigation of that experience; and the extension of such an experience to a large number of people.¹⁵

In the light of this twofold need it is time for God's preachers and people to ask themselves some serious questions. Do we truly believe the Bible is the Word of God? Is it really sufficient for all matters of faith and practice? Is God holy, sovereign, and in control of all things? Is Jesus Christ the only and sufficient Lord and Savior? Does the Spirit of God really convict and regenerate sinners when the gospel is proclaimed? Is salvation wholly of the Lord and does not need man's help (either the sinner's or ours) in accomplishing it? Is the triune God worthy to be worshiped exclusively, loved supremely, submitted to wholly, and obeyed totally? Is the local church really "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15) and still God's instrument to carry out His purpose in this age? Has the Head of the church actually commanded us to evangelize the whole world, and does He expect it will be accomplished?

If so, why do we walk by sight and human reason, if "faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17)? If we say the Word of God is true and trustworthy, why are we reinterpreting the creation account according to scientific old age theories when the Genesis record clearly teaches a six 24 hour a day creation, thus undermine in our children's minds as well as the world's the authority of the New Testament gospel message?¹⁶ If the Word of God is sufficient, why are we using humanistic psychology, market strategies, soulless centered programs, *etc.*, to build our churches? If God is holy, why are we emphasizing His love above His holy nature, neglecting or denying His message of judgment and hell, trying to make sinners feel better about themselves while still in their rebellion; so insensitive to sin in our own lives; and grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit in our churches? If God is sovereign and in control, why are we so man-centered in our theology, worship, and methodology, and why don't we Christians exhibit the submission and peace that such a truth should produce? If the Lord Jesus Christ is the only and sufficient Savior, why are we tolerating teaching that says men can be saved without hearing the gospel, and why are we so unconcerned about the multitudes in the world who have never heard this message of salvation? If He is the Lord and Savior, why are we getting sinners to do things, such as walk down isles, pray after us, and then tell them they are saved because they did so, instead of point them to Christ and trust in Him alone for salvation? If Christ is Lord, why don't we tell sinners that saving faith includes repentance from sin and

acknowledgement of His lordship in principle, which results in a radical change of life from sin's dominion to obeying His lordship in practice, instead of tell them that they can take Him as Savior today and make Him Lord later (if they feel like it)?¹⁷ Why do we seek to devise the most ingenious "soulwinning" techniques to extract decisions out of sinners and then try to prop up those decisions with follow-up methods and unbiblical concepts of sanctification, if we believe the Holy Spirit is the regenerator and sanctifier and that salvation is of the Lord? Why do we act as if the members in the pews are spectators and recipients, and the pastor, choir, singers, worship leaders, and what-not on the platform, are the performers, when we say we are in church to worship God, Who is observing all of us and is to be the object of our attention? Why are we not continually yielding our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) in the light of our Lord's sacrificial love for us and the promise of continuing grace (1 John 4:19)? Why don't we know more of what the church is really about, when it is Christ's Body, the Holy Spirit's temple, and the divine light-bearing instrument (lampstand, Rev. 1-3)? Why doesn't the world know we are Christ's disciples through our love one for another, when we've all heard what Jesus said about this in John 13:34-35? If we have been commissioned to preach the gospel to the whole creation (Mk. 16:15), why are we not praying with Christ's compassion for laborers for the harvest fields (Mt. 9:36-38), not giving sacrificially for the spread of the gospel, instead of living such self-centered and comfortable lifestyles, and not going ourselves somewhere: to our family, across the street or across the sea? Why are we not praying for reformation and revival in our lives, our local churches, and the cause of Christ at large? If we desire God to bless America through His church—*why not?*

There is always hope of revival. God bless America? Better yet, "God, bless America through Thy Church!" Whether this will mean a witness to an unrepentant America through persecution and suffering (this has been the norm in Church History), or in an Evangelical Awakening that will change the moral climate of our land and prolong the nation for the benefit of world evangelism, we should be willing to submit to whatever God has for us. If the nation will not repent, still the Church must repent, reform, and seek God for His blessing.

Summing Things Up

Where does God fit in the future of America? He fits just where He is—enthroned in heaven in sovereign control of all things! His Son is seated at His right hand, interceding for His Church, ruling as head of the Body of Christ, and nearer each moment to the time He will return to put all enemies under His feet! The Holy Spirit is here, indwelling true believers, empowering the Church as it fulfills God's purpose for this age, convicting and regenerating sinners through the preaching of the gospel until that last soul is saved.

Where does the Bible fit in the future of America? The promise is that "the word of the Lord endureth forever, and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you" (1 Pet. 1:25). In spite of how it is hated, rejected, ridiculed, misinterpreted, twisted, distorted, and watered down by preachers, liberals, cultists, and an flood of translations, Jesus promised, "heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt. 24:35). It will still have power to save, and will meet America at the judgment.

Where does the Church fit in the future of America? Jesus said He would build His Church, “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). Whether the true remnant will suffer persecution from an unrepentant America or see glorious days of revival and awakening, the Head of the Church will equip and empower her to be faithful and persevere.

Where do *you* fit in the future of America? Have you been saved by the grace of God and love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in obedience to His word? Or are you walking in the “broad road” in America’s path downward away from God, His law, and His love? I plead with you to come to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, acknowledge your sins before Him, call upon Him for His saving, forgiving mercy.

Christian, are you a part of the problem or the solution? Are you grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit by a life of unfaithfulness to Christ, prayerlessness, neglect of the Bible, lack of concern for the state of the church, your country, and the lost without Christ around you? The last word Jesus gave the Church was not the Great Commission; it was “*repent*” (Rev. 2:5, 16; 3:3,19). Revival is for the Church; awakening is for the world. It must begin at the house of God: “if my people, which are called by my name, humble themselves . . . pray . . . seek my face . . . turn from their wicked ways, then . . .” (2 Chron. 7:14). If you are faithfully seeking the Lord’s best in your life, bless you! Keep persevering, your not alone! The blessing will come!

Thank you, and God bless America!

End Notes

¹ This message is Chapter 17 of the forthcoming book, *The Revival Pulpit*, published by Revival Literature, Asheville, NC.

² James R. White, *God Bless America (but don’t ask us to repent)*, <http://www.aomin.org>. Wed. 26 Sept. 2001. See also John MacArthur, *Can God Bless America?* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2002).

³ See Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994).

⁴ See William Chadwick, *Stealing Sheep: The Church’s Hidden Problem with Transfer Growth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001). For an evaluation of the plusses and problems of the Church Growth Movement see G. A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, vol. 2 of the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, John E. Smith, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959); Eric E. Wright in *Strange Fire? Assessing the Vineyard Movement and the Toronto Blessing* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1996), 330, gives some of Edwards’ list of twelve “no-signs” that neither prove or disprove a work of God:

1. It is no sign one way or another, that religious affections are very great, or raised very high;
2. that great effects are produced on the bodies of participants;
3. that people are fervent, fluent and abundant in talking about spiritual things;
4. that good feelings arise unbidden—they may come from false spirits who often give false comforts and joys;
5. that they come from texts of Scripture suddenly brought to mind, since the devil loves to pervert Scripture;

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6. that they produce love, since some may have religious love but not saving grace. Christian love may be counterfeited; . . .
 9. that they spend much time in external duties of worship and religion;
 10. that they praise and glorify God with their mouths;
 11. that they show great confidence that what they have experienced is divine;
 12. that the truly godly are deeply affected and pleased by their profession.

⁶ Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 16, 17.

⁷ Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005). See John MacArthur, Jr., gen. ed., *Think Biblically! Recovering a Christian Worldview* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003).

⁸ Veith, *Postmodern Times*, pp. 17,18.

⁹ John Armstrong, gen. ed., *The Coming Evangelical Crisis: Current Challenges to the Authority of Scripture and the Gospel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996); David Wells, *No Place for Truth; Or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? God In the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Dreams*; and *The Courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, 1994, 2008).

¹⁰ Jim Elliff, "Revival and the Unregenerate Church Member," *Reformation and Revival Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Spring, 1999), 41-46.

¹¹ Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999), *Counterfeit Revival: Looking for God in All the Wrong Places* (Dallas: Word, 1997); *Christianity in Crisis: 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009). Hanegraaff covers two generations of the Word Faith (Prosperity Gospel) Movement in his books. See also John MacArthur, *Strange Fire: The Danger of Offending the Holy Spirit with Counterfeit Worship* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2013).

¹² Cited by Armstrong, *When God Moves*, p. 70.

¹³ David Wells, *The Bleeding of the Evangelical Church* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995), 7.

¹⁴ Tom Nettles, "A Better Way: Church Growth Through Reformation and Revival," *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 162.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹⁶ Check out Answers in Genesis, www.answersingenesis.org and the Institute of Creation Research, www.icr.org.

¹⁷ See Robert Lescelius, *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers* (Asheville: Revival Literature, 1992).