



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

My answer to Pastor Patterson's rather pathetic response to my public comments on his defying of the anti-covidvirus regulations and his opening of his church for worship

Below is my answer to Pastor Patterson's response to my comments on his stance on the Covid -19 virus which were published in the 'Belfast Newsletter' some days ago.

He mounted his response on his own church webpage without ever informing me - a strange way indeed to 'earnestly contend for the faith'!

The whole thrust of the pastor and his supporters' argument seems to be that the virus is of no real significance and that those who take precautions are a lot of fools and weaklings!

I cannot imagine that this attitude engenders much comfort to the hundreds of families who have lost loved ones to the virus. I just hope that he does not have to explain just where his notions were wrong, should there be an outbreak of infections in Tandragee!

Please pray for the cause of truth and for this land caught up in a spirit of defiance of the judgment of God sent upon it for its sin.

Here are timely verses in the wake of this controversy:

Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain, Isaiah 26:20-21.

Pastor David Patterson, of Tandragee Baptist Church, who recently availed himself of the columns of the Belfast Newsletter' to propound his theory that Christians should defy the Stormont Executive's regulations regarding the closing of public buildings, including church buildings. I used the same columns to publish a response as well as putting it up on my own website.

Pastor Patterson has now responded to my comments on his church's 'Facebook' page. This is far removed from the public platform upon which he first launched this controversy and upon which I responded to him. There are those Christians who foolishly said I should have replied to Pastor Patterson privately rather than in the 'Belfast Newsletter'! I think that Pastor Patterson may be of that school of thought for he has replied to me so privately he did not even let me know that he had!

I do not use FaceBook' but a friend copied what was said and emailed it to me. I will be using email and my own website to reply to his comments.

1. Pastor Patterson first of all states that my comments "had no foundation in Scripture just a rant interwoven with verses out of context." Furthermore it was "the poorest exegesis of the word of God that he had witnessed." Those are quite serious allegations to make against a minister of the gospel and all the more reprehensible in that they are without any word of proof!

I would have liked Pastor Patterson to have shown just where my quotations of Scripture were out of context and misapplied. Sadly, he has failed to do that! Making allegations is one thing; proving them is another!

I challenge him to show just how the Scriptures I quoted were taken out of context.

A 'rant' is, according to Collin's Dictionary, something that is 'loud, violent and bombastic'! Is that really a fair and Christian assessment of my article? I will leave it to others to decide that.



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It is a favourite tactic of those who do not like, or who cannot adequately reply to what is being said to them, to label their critic a 'ranter'. I confess that such a label has been put on me before - by the worldly hater of God's truth. This is a first time for a Christian to employ the tactic!

Pastor Patterson then denies that he said that to gather "for worship we must meet in a church building." If he believes that the Christian does not require the use of a church building in order to worship God, just what was he complaining about when he objected to the closing of church buildings? In the past he organised 'drive-in' services. Why was this inadequate this time?

His third point is the weakest of all. He states that I surrender the "sole right of King Jesus the Redeemer and Head of His Church, to legislate alone for His Church, and gives that right to a godless secular Executive."

I just wonder what Bible the Pastor employs? My Bible tells me that the Lord Jesus said that we are to "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's," Matthew 22:21. Paul the apostle further enlarges upon this truth in various places, none better known than Romans 13:1-7.

Paul tells us that by obeying 'the higher powers' we are in fact obeying the Lord since He ordained and instituted them. Christians are thus taught that there are aspects of their life that are governed by earthly powers. We are thus honouring the Kingship of Christ!

Surely public health is one of the elements under the control and jurisdiction of the 'powers that be'?

An old preacher some 102 years ago said in the midst of the 'Spanish 'Flu' pandemic in the USA:

"Another thing that has impressed me, in connection with this epidemic, is the fact that conditions may arise in a community which justify the extraordinary exercise of powers that would not be tolerated under ordinary circumstances. This extraordinary exercise of power was resorted to by the Commissioners in closing up the theaters, schools, and churches, in forbidding all gatherings of any considerable number of people indoors and outdoors, and in restricting the numbers who should be present even at funerals. The ground of the exercise of this extraordinary power was found in the imperative duty of the officials to safeguard, as far as possible, the health of the community by preventing the spread of the disease from which we were suffering. There has been considerable grumbling, I know, on the part of some, particularly in regard to the closing of the churches. It seems to me, however, in a matter like this it is always wise to submit to such restrictions for the time being. If, as a matter of fact, it was dangerous to meet in theaters and in the schools, it certainly was no less dangerous to meet in churches." - Francis J. Grimke on Sunday, November 3, 1918, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, USA.

I find the old preacher's logic rather compelling! If there is danger from the virus in pubs, dance halls and restaurants then it is a threat to those gathered in church buildings. In saying that there are matters in which we should obey civil government (except when it contravenes the Word of God) I have the full authority of King Jesus!

Pastor Patterson accuses me of telling a falsehood about him. He says that in my rebuttal I "again falsely suggests" that he had said something he had not. The use of the word 'again' indicates that he believes I have done this more than once! He is making me out to be a liar.

Here is what Pastor Patterson wrote in the Belfast Newsletter. "The Executive in directing the citizens of Northern Ireland not to meet for the public worship of God, acted beyond their God given mandate, because the Executive's prohibition on the public worship of God is contrary to Scripture."

My response to that was to observe: "Unless I missed something, I did not read of the Executive prohibiting the public worship of God! Christian assemblies were quite free to organise open-air gatherings, fellowshiping together around the Word of God via video links etc." The inference I placed upon his words was entirely legitimate.



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Why did not the Pastor protest earlier this year when a similar restriction was imposed upon the churches? Instead of protesting I understand he organised, very properly, 'drive-in' church services! Such gatherings are indeed true worship services for has not the Lord Jesus said: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," Matthew 18:20.

What has changed to make the restrictions of the last two weeks so different from the same laws which he observed earlier in the year. If there is 'subterfuge' and 'twisting' I don't honestly believe it is on my part.

The Pastor goes on then to accuse me of being a coward, fearing man and the virus. A person of my age has every right to 'fear' the covidvirus. Indeed, it is wise to do. Putting one's life in danger is no part of God's will for His people. For this reason Joseph was instructed by the angel of God: "Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him, Matthew 2:13. Or were the people of God cowards when they fled out of Jerusalem when faced with the threat to life that the persecution of Saul of Tarsus entailed, Acts 8:2-3. Or was David a coward when he fled from Saul, 1 Samuel 19:10, 18. The covidvirus is every bit as much a real threat as was Saul's spear! The deaths that have taken place in the Province and further afield, tend to suggest surely that the threat is real! There are few but have had friends, loved ones or neighbours taken away by this virus. It is utter folly to mock these deaths and make out that such as take the matter seriously are mere cowardly weaklings!

Such name-calling does not bother me. I have been through too much in my 50+ years of preaching and contending for the truth of God for such 'school playground' name-calling from the Pastor and his supporters to have any effect upon me.

I have been quite a vociferous 'coward' in my opposition to the Stormont Executive since its inception in 2007. I wonder can Pastor Patterson say that? He certainly had his opportunities to do battle with the Executive over the years on issues like power-sharing with murderers, financial support for sodomite organisations, failing to rightly forthrightly oppose the introduction of abortion and same-sex marriage.

I might just have missed the Pastor's sallying forth to do battle for the Lord on these issues. If I did I can only say that I would have liked to have witnessed how he 'fought the good fight'!

The Bible, history and common sense are opposed to Pastor Patterson and his rather belated crusade. I fear that there will be a price to pay for underestimating the threat posed by the Covid virus. It is evident that the Pastor and his supporters, who have shared their views with me, do not believe that this pestilence is of God. If they did they surely would not lead their people to despise it.

To those who consider that the virus should not be treated as seriously as the restrictions would require us, I can but quote the prophet Amos. "Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?" 3:6. But then it likely will be said again that I am quoting the Bible out of context and misapplying it.

That is one way of avoiding the truth of God!

Sincerely in Christ's cause and covenant,

Ivan Foster.