



Exploring God's Love Through the Bible

A Response in Love: The Posture and Life of the Christian in Tragic Times

July 10, 2016

TEXT: 1 PETER 3:8-22

Today, I'd like to attempt to answer some questions: What do we do now? What do we do in response? How shall we live?

- Peter in his second epistle, phrased it this way: *"Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be...?"*
- He immediately gives the answer: *"...in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."* (2 Pet 3:11-13)
- Pointing the suffering church to the eventual judgment of God and the glory of heaven, Peter, via the Holy Spirit, nails the posture I'd like to suggest to you. He goes on:

Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace....You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. (2 Pet 3:14, 17-18)

I don't think any pastor can answer these questions perfectly. But the Scriptures are still our best source; and their Author our best Solution.

OUR MOTIVES

- Oh friends, we join many in the Nation in mourning the loss of life this week, and our hearts break for the families affected.
- We felt the need to pause our time in Exodus and point: point away from man's wisdom to God's; point away from flesh to the Spirit; and point to the ultimate problem in the world that we might see clearly the ultimate Solution: the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Why is this important? Because we are in perilous times (2 Tim 3:1-4). The church, while weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15) and mourning with those who mourn, must help the people of God cut through the carnal clutter to see Christ. He remains:

The image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body,

the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col 1:15-18)

- The spiritual situation hasn't changed. Man is infected from birth with the disease of sin. Our very nature is to rebel against God.
- That rebellion brings great suffering. We've seen that clearly this week. What I fear is that instead of taking up the armor of God, "that we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil" (Eph 6:11), and crucifying our flesh that we might walk in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26), we will respond in a fleshly manner. Precious friends, now is the time to love.
- Now, walking in love doesn't mean we hide painful truths. Love is rooted in and rejoices with the truth (cf. Jn 14:6; 1 Cor 13:6)!
- But Christian love certainly means that our posture, especially during times of suffering, reflects the character of Jesus:

*Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. **So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.** (1 Cor 13:4-13)*

PETER'S CONTEXT

1. 1 Peter was written to those who were the "elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." (1 Pet 1:1)
2. Generally thought to have been written by the Apostle Peter in the early to mid-60's AD, either prior to or during the Neronian persecution of Christians, this epistle was written to encourage suffering Christians in provinces we know today as modern Turkey.
3. Given the region addressed, many scholars believe that Peter's intended audience would have a large gentile population, as well as Jewish Christians...an ethnically diverse group. How relevant!
4. The theme throughout the letter is clear:

*In this you rejoice, **though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials**, (7) so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Pet 1:6-7)*

*For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, **one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.** (20) For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (1 Pet 2:19-20)*

But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, (15) *but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect. (1 Pet 3:14-15)*

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin. (1 Pet 4:1)

Beloved, ***do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you,*** as though something strange were happening to you. (13) ***But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings,*** that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (14) *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Pet 4:12-14)*

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (9) *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. (10) **And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*** (1 Pet 5:8-10)

So how should we respond to calamities, injustices, perversions, and revilings? Should we lose hope or copy carnal solutions? Or even then, can we trust in the Word of God?

PETER'S POSTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

In the midst of growing suffering and persecution, Peter gives such wonderful (counterintuitive in our day) counsel to the church of the living God.

- He calls for unity, sympathy, brotherly love, tenderness, and **humility** (v8).
- Make **no** mistake; these things require **tremendous** strength and power, especially during suffering! They require the Holy Ghost!
- He goes deeper in verse 9, eschewing **retaliation** and echoing the command of Christ in Matthew 5:44: *"But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you."* (KJV)
- In verses 10-12, he paints a basic picture of the Christian life; one of **holiness** in word and action, and one of peace. He reminds believers that the blessings of God are upon those who pursue such.
- Peter suggests that godly behavior limits damage and drama (v13), but also lifts up a courageous, blessed life even if suffering comes! How is this possible?
- **Because in the heart of the one who is suffering, when they are suffering well, Christ is honored as holy!** The focus has shifted...off of **circumstances** and onto Jesus (v15)!
- In fact, while suffering, the believer is supposed to be able to give "a reason for the hope that is in you" with gentleness and respect (v15)! Yes! That takes the power of the Holy Spirit!
- And if suffering continues in the form of slander, even one's enemies have to point to the saint's good behavior (v16). This is part of a Christian's **witness**.

- Verse 17 is very challenging. It implies that suffering can sometimes be God's will, and that if so, we are to suffer well.
- But if verse 17 implies an *imperative*; verse 18 gives an *indicative*. The command is to suffer well if it's God's will. The reason is because "Christ also suffered," and His suffering accomplished for us what we could not achieve on our own! Praise Him!
- Verse 19-21 gives us a snapshot of the wonder of Christ's sacrifice. Many believe that the Spirit of Christ spoke through Noah as Noah heralded righteousness (2 Pet 2:5).

The point is this: as Noah was persecuted for righteousness and God saved Him, likewise God's church will be as well, and that same God will save them!

SO HOW SHALL WE LIVE?

My conclusion: We shall live in love and faith in Jesus, building lives of holiness and righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit, responding to calamity with grace and perseverance...because this world is NOT our home. If we are called to suffer, we shall in joy, because our Lord did so in joy (Heb 12:2), even while believing God for better days.

FINAL THOUGHTS

To be clear, what we have seen over the last week is absolutely heartbreaking. I have NO words to fully describe it. Friends, I don't have the expertise to point you to, nor do I have much confidence in socio-political solutions. Others are much more gifted at that than I.

I am however, 100% confident in Jesus our LORD, and the belief that it is to Him we must look, and in Him we must trust.

It is up to us, the Spirit-filled believers of this Nation, to forge a better path and build better lives; lives rooted in the Gospel of Jesus and overflowing with the love of God. If this happens, it will happen family by family, and church by church.

I am a strong believer in self-defense, but even that God-given right must be rooted in love. Violence is not the answer. Neither are civil laws. Civil laws, by design, are meant to regulate **sin**. They cannot change men's hearts.

The answer is the same as always: [Jesus](#).

Preach Him. Love Him. Live in Him. May He call us to Him and heal our Nation.

Amen.

CRCC Home-study: I am asking all to read, as a family, 1st and 2nd Peter, and to reread the *Imagine* tract this week. :)