

Being the Church...Regardless

I. Christ's Church on Earth has *always* had to contend with serious, life threatening dangers. Always!

- Persecution from both Rome and the Jewish religious establishment.
- Warfare in 70 AD and throughout the centuries
- Regular intervals of sickness and plagues.
- Famines and other natural disasters.
- Economic deprivations resulting from prejudice
- Consider the Church today in East Africa, India, etc. where there is famine, persecution & disease at the same time!

II. Some trials are directed at the church *because* of their Jesus-first loyalty and faith. (This is persecution)

Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

1 John 3:13 (NASB)

III. Some trials Christians share in as part of the overall community in which they live. (Hopefully as servants)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4 (NIV)

IV. The capacity to endure, persevere and even prosper and grow in times of trial or persecution is developed!

1. We need to embrace an eternal perspective

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12 (NIV)

2. We need to embrace a "love your neighbor" perspective

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Galatians 5:13-14 (NIV)

3. We need to adopt a "bring honor to God" perspective

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God-- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

V. A great example: The Macedonian response to a crisis

Brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 (NIV)

What must be considered as we navigate our time of trial?

1. The safety of our members/guests is our primary concern
2. Scripture's commands related to those in authority
3. God's call on us to be His "hands and feet" to serve a hurting world regardless of the potential danger to us
4. Our public witness: The perception of those outside the church as to the propriety of our actions.
5. Recommendations from the CDC and other experts
6. Economic considerations as people balance their need to care for their families with concerns for the health of society
7. Respect for people's differing perspectives on the seriousness of the pandemic and the proper ways to address it.

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God.

Show proper respect to everyone:

- Love the brotherhood of believers,
- fear God,
- honor the king.

1 Peter 2:13-17 (NIV)