

Stand Your Ground in Tribulation

Romans 12:12b

It is reported that Yogi Berra once offered the following nugget of uncertain wisdom: “If you come to a fork in the road, take it. You never know when you might need it.” The humor of Mr. Berra’s word play is lost however when we look at the economic “fork” in the road to which the United States of America has come. It has long been known that we are a divided nation – traditionalists versus progressives. Others might label our division as conservative versus liberal, or the wealthy versus the poor, or perhaps strict constitutionalists versus relativistic constitutionalists. Regardless, the outcome will be the same. Liberalism and the political child she bore (moral relativism) have finally come of age.

The most liberal, left-wing ideologue ever to serve as president of these United States, along with a democratic majority the past 18 months in both houses of the Congress, have greatly advanced the cause of liberalism, which is socialism. The number of people hired by governmental agencies over the past year has significantly increased the number of liberal left-wing-leaning employees, thus insuring that liberal ideology will continue to hold sway over governmental policies for decades to come. Government-sponsored immorality will only increase. Abortion funding, homosexual rights, environmental worship, entitlement programs, and the unlawful additions of unwritten amendments to our constitution by the courts will make it more and more difficult for committed followers of Jesus Christ to live in the U.S. unless we are willing to abandon our right to speak out and are willing to live just below the you-don’t-matter-at-all line, i.e. our opinions don’t matter.

Those who follow Christ will find it extremely difficult to live in an immoral society and not speak out against it, particularly when the government will demand that our children be indoctrinated (public education) with its humanistic, socialistic world-view. Our choices will be significantly limited. Followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to live in such a way that our lives convict and condemn the ungodly. As Americans, our government celebrates and values minorities. Every dollar earned or borrowed should be spent to insure that the equality of minorities equals the “haves” both economically, socially, politically, and environmentally is the core of their thinking. Sadly however, truly committed Christians (a true minority) are not included in that group. Saints of the Most High God: we have a problem, and it has gotten precipitously worse in the last 18 months. What are we to do?

First, as Americans, we can attempt to work within the political system. We must vote!

Second, at no time in the history of this country has preaching the gospel to make converts to Jesus Christ been more imperative than now. We must grow the ranks of those who know that God will not tolerate national immorality forever.

Third, Christians must prepare for the worst – the persecution of the righteous.

It is this last point upon which I want to dwell now. The apostle writes to the Romans, “be patient in tribulation,” (ESV, 12:12). Talk about an oxymoron – that has to be the mother of them all. Nevertheless, this is what the Scriptures command for those who follow Jesus Christ.

Chapter 12 of the book of Romans follows 11 of the most doctrinally-developed chapters in the whole Bible. Chapter 12 begins the “so what?” section of the book. If all that Paul writes about in the first eleven chapters is true, what should believers do about it? Chapters 12-16 give Paul’s specifics. Among a long list of “do’s” concerning how believers are to live with each other, Paul includes “be patient in tribulation.” He is obviously speaking about a believer’s conduct towards outsiders.

In this Greek clause, the noun “tribulation” (θλίψις) comes first. As a verb, the word originally meant “to press” or “to squash” as in the treading of grapes. In the N.T., the word is used in a figurative sense. A person is not literally in a wine vat having the life squeezed out of him. Rather, almost all N.T. usage invariably has a figurative sense that denotes serious trouble. Sometimes “tribulation” (θλίψις) can mean simple distress brought about by outward circumstances as in 2 Cor. 1:4, Phil. 1:17, 1 Thess. 1:6, or 2 Thess. 1:4. But it can also have an eschatological or last days’ significance as in Mark 13:19, Romans 8:35, 2 Cor. 4:17, or Col. 1:24.

It certainly has been a great blessing for us to live in the United States of America. However, it is clear that a transition is taking place. Committed Christians will increasingly experience the consequences of intolerance. To date, for the most part, followers of Jesus Christ in America have only experienced the setting aside of our moral values. Human behavior, long deemed wicked and uncivilized, is now legally recognized to be normal, and those who believe otherwise are thought to be Neanderthals, homophobic, or worse – right-wing extremists whose attitudes concerning guns, guts and God must be closely watched while the radicals on the left continually get a pass in the media.

It is only going to get worse! *Tribulation* will come; it is only a matter of time. That the same word is used to describe both what is happening now and what will happen during the days just prior to our Lord’s return suggests that these things will slowly deteriorate over time. What began as social persecution will eventually give way to verbal, emotional and ultimately physical persecution. It is in regard to this that Paul commands, “be patient.”

By the verb “to be patient” (Greek: *hupomeno*), the idea that Paul suggests here is “to hold one’s ground.” This is not a passive “living up under” our circumstances. As Howard Hendricks often quips, “What are you doing down there?” Rather, this is an active campaign. Followers of Jesus

Christ are “to hold their ground in tribulation.” We are not to yield to the moral relativism of our day. We are not to backup or yield even one inch, but rather maintain our testimony regarding God’s ways and works. We must boldly proclaim the will of God concerning sin and its consequences, and not yield ground to those who attempt to lead by deception.

In Romans 5:3-5, Paul states,

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The outcome of whatever suffering or persecution we experience in this life can be a good one if we will only believe and live out what Scripture commands. The term “suffering” in Romans 5:3 above is the same word Paul uses in Romans 12:12 for tribulation. Tribulation is but the first step in a process that will ultimately glorify Christ and bring blessing upon those who follow Him.

Fear is the main enemy – fear of physical pain. This is the major obstacle we must overcome. Please begin to pray that God would help you not only face this fear, but also overcome it. If you have not read my book: *Flight, Fight, or Faith: How to Survive the Great Tribulation*, please get a copy a.s.a.p. It was written for just such a time as now.

Charles Cooper