

James 3:18 Interlude: A Harvest of Righteousness

Introduction

People of God, Russell Moore, who is the former president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which is the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote a blog in 2015 titled, “Is Christianity Dying?”

Shockingly, in the blog he praises the rise of secularization, and the decline of Bible Belt Christianity. He criticized cultural Christianity because, get this, it made people who wanted a divorce to remain married for the wrong reason. Cultural Christianity, he said, made people not get a divorce for fear that a divorce would marginalize them from their communities. A divorce had bad social standing. And Russell Moore thinks that is a bad thing.

He said, “In that sense, their ‘traditional family values’ were motivated by the same thing that motivated the religious leaders who rejected Jesus—fear of being ‘put out of the synagogue.’ Now, to be sure, that kept some children in intact families. But that’s hardly revival.”

Moore criticized the cultural influence of Christianity, which incentivized families to stay together, because he would prefer divorce happened and families be destroyed, if it means that revival happens.

Critique of Cultural Christianity?

The Southern Baptist Convention's leading ethicist prefers a society in which hostility to Christianity is normal and acceptable.

He says:

"We don't have Mayberry anymore, if we ever did. Good. Mayberry leads to hell just as surely as Gomorrah does. But Christianity didn't come from Mayberry in the first place, but from a Roman Empire hostile to the core of the idea of a crucified and resurrected Messiah. We've been on the wrong side of history since Rome, and it was enough to turn the world upside down."

Moore celebrates the loss of those mild social norms that led to safe neighborhoods, intact families, high social trust, and that brought people to gospel preaching on Sundays, like the fictional North Carolina town of Mayberry from the Andy Griffith show. "Good riddance" Moore says.

Moore believes, along with many other Christians, that a Christianity that is always in a precarious position, in minority status, being chased around and persecuted all over the empire, is better than a well-ordered Christian society where Christian morals are the norm. For these are the conditions which will bring about revival.

How does a person come to this position? It is because he has misunderstood the place and purpose of much of the New Testament.

The Dual Dangers in Persecution

Now I have been making the case for the past few months about the potential dangers that can tempt the people of God who are experiencing persecution, and loss of political, and social power.

On the one hand I have been warning about the dangers of anger, violence, and zealotry. And on the other hand, I have been warning about the dangers of compromising the faith by currying favor with our secular persecutors, and even joining forces with them against your fellow Christians.

When your enemies, or even our fellow Christians attack and slander us and say all kinds of evil against us, when they accuse us of false things, when they are intent on purposely misunderstanding us, labelling us in order to destroy us, the instruction I have been giving you is:

Be patient, learn to suffer for righteousness' sake, do not repay evil for evil, but pray for your enemies, whether they are believers or unbelievers. Endure suffering and hardship patiently and with joy like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. And trust God to judge and let him vindicate you.

This how Christ responded to personal attacks against him. And this is how he won the victory. The Meek shall inherit the earth.

Wisdom for Emergency Situations

Now these are good instructions. Of Course. But if you think, like Russell Moore, that persecution is the only context in which Christianity is meant to exist, you may be tempted to think that James' instruction that we suffer with meekness, is the only action that you are allowed to take as a Christian.

But this wisdom that James imparts to his readers, is not the only instructions Christians are to consider. In fact, I would like to make the case that the teachings James and Jesus give about how to respond to persecution is like the emergency instructions you receive before your flight takes off.

In the case of an emergency landing, here are the exits. And if the cabin loses pressure, oxygen masks will drop from the ceiling. Make sure you put your mask on before you help someone else.

Which is to say, that the directions that James gives us in his letter are how we are to behave in an emergency situation of persecution. That is important.

But nobody who hears the emergency instructions before a flight interprets the words of the flight attendant to mean that the whole flight is to be one long continual emergency. Nor do they think that they should jettison the manual for how to fly a plane under normal conditions.

Misinterpretation of Perpetual Persecution

But what many Christians assume when they read the NT is that because emergency instructions are given, that the whole history of the Christian church should therefore be one of persecution all the time. They think that persecution, suffering, hardship, and political and social exile is normative for all Christians in every place and time.

And so they do not have categories in their mind about how to establish and maintain godly societies, and to help develop Christian civilization. They think that Christendom is against NT Christianity.

This is why these Christians think that the worst thing that could have happened to the church is that Emperor Constantine made Christianity legal in the Roman Empire with the Edict of Milan in 313 AD.

If the Church is supposed to be always in a position of social exile and be constantly on the run from the State, and if her mission is only ever to redeem people from hell, and that's it, then the best situation for the church is to be

persecuted. For when times are chaotic and your life is in jeopardy, then your spirit is more susceptible to receiving the good news that Jesus Christ died to save you from hell.

But that is not the full truth, people of God. First of all, it is not normative for all Christians at all times and places to live in a state of persecution and political and social exile. Interpreting the Bible in such a way as if the Church were always supposed to be in a state of persecution is detrimental to the health of the body of Christ.

Secondly, the Church's mission is not just to save souls from hell. We have been saved to disciple the nations teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Christian discipleship is therefore far more extensive than just knowing Jesus died to save your soul from hell.

The Church is meant to disciple the people and their rulers to live in private and public, in their official public offices and vocations, according to the Lordship of Christ. Christ desires that nations as nations, consisting of its civil laws and social customs, are to be conducted under the Lordship of Christ in order to procure for itself both earthly and heavenly good.

God's Instructions for a Normal Civilizational Life

As evidence of this, consider the significance of the Bible's major storyline – the Exodus from Egypt. When God

brought Israel out of Egypt, He did so in order to give them laws and instructions about how they were to govern their nation under the blessing and rule of God.

God instructed Israel about the things need for building a nation and a civilization. He taught them about proper ways adjudicate laws concerning crime and punishment, how to establish religious orders of Priests and Levites, that they should have standardized monetary weights and measurements. God gave them laws about loans and repayments, laws that governed warfare, medical practices, agriculture, geographical boundaries, national holidays, taxes, and of course rules regulating the worship of God.

Since we understand that God redeemed one nation of Israel to make them a great nation for His glory, shouldn't we also believe that God redeemed the world in Christ and so desires to have all nations be great under his blessing and rule?

If God had intended His redeemed people to be permanently persecuted, then why bring them out of Egypt? Why ever bring them into the land?

The Story of the Bible, the story of our redemption is one in which God saves a people and establishes them as a nation, to be light to all the other nations surrounding them. This story line, and the laws that are given, and the

purpose for which they are given do not reflect the idea that the church is supposed to exist in a constant state of persecution. What it implies is God redeems His people from persecution in order to establish them as a nation. It implies something like Christian Nationalism.

Applying Emergency Instructions Wisely

So, what I am trying to say is, that the instructions James gives about not responding to persecution with anger and violence and not compromising the faith by currying favor with the wicked, these are good and sound instructions when we are in that kind of emergency situation. In case of an emergency landing, we ought to know where the exits are. But those instructions in no way make void the standard operating procedures for normal flight.

The question that we need to ask ourselves is, what kind of situation are we in here and now? Are we in full scale emergency crash landing mode? Or ought we to be about the ordinary operating procedures of establishing a godly Christian social order? Or, perhaps is it a mixture of both?

Responding to Cultural Challenges

Let's say we are in the airplane of civilization, and we are flying at 30,000 feet. As Christians it is our solemn Christian duty to make sure the plane keeps flying safely, so we can get to our destination in peace. We do that by

teaching everyone on board to obey all that Jesus commanded. And things were going quite well for while.

But in recent years a few problem people have been making a ruckus in the back of the plane. These people have read all the wrong kinds of books, gone to all the wrong kinds of schools, and have all the wrong kinds of ideas.

They are saying they hate airplanes, for airplanes reflect flight-supremacy. They resist the Pilotarchy, and they think that crashing the plane and causing chaos among the passengers is the best way in which we will all have true freedom and justice from the oppressive law of gravity.

I think we can all admit that those people are insane. They are in the plane of civilization, and they are manufacturing a crisis. They are trying to scare the passengers by pulling down the oxygen masks and forcing them on to people's faces, while guilt manipulating people into thinking and acting as if there is a real crisis, other than the one they are creating. They are making a big mess of the restroom, and they flipped over the drink carts. And some are even so bold as to talk about getting into the cabin to crash the plane.

But what we need is people who can be calm and steady, and who can think clearly and soberly, and who can

recognize the threat to the plane of civilization, and know how to respond to it. We need people who can bring stabilization and peace and order to a crazy situation.

What we do not need is for everyone to follow the lead of the crazies and get scared and anxious and give into their emotional manipulation. We don't need panic among the passengers to set in, so that they start fighting against one another, or even worse, fighting against the people who are trying to restore order to the chaos. And we certainly don't need the pilots listening to the ramblings of these people. That will only make our situation worse. But of course, that is also happening.

The Need for Calm and Order

What we need right now are a few good Air Marshalls who can arrest these people, quiet them down, and restore order to the plane. We need the flight attendants to enforce the rules of proper conduct on the plane, and we need pilots who know how to fly the plane of civilization safely, and who do not give into the demands of the crazies. This is for the good of everyone on board.

Let us move away for a moment from the airplane and use another analogy. Let us say that the problem we have in our civilization is like a sickness in the body. The crazies are the woke mind virus, and what we need is a strong

immune system which can fight off infections in the body politic of the nation – in her institutions, and in the churches to help restore normal health back to the body.

But we have another problem. And it is the kind of problem I mentioned before. Not only do we have the crazies trying to crash the plane, we have Christians who think that the best thing for the passengers is to be in airplane crash. They think that the Church is to be perpetually persecuted, and the body always sick. And the sicker the better. For then we can help people to believe in Jesus more easily for fear of dying. This is how you get revival.

They think that the cultural conditions which are most conducive to conversion is one which is hostile to Christianity.

Yes, it is true, that God, in his amazing grace, has so designed the church that when his people are persecuted, we multiply and grow in greater depth. The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

But that is just like a body's immune system. When the body is fighting off an infection, it will increase its white blood cell count to attack the infection and bring healing to the body. Which is good. Praise the Lord.

But that does not mean that God designed the body to be in a state of constant infection and sickness. God did not intend for the body to be continually producing excessive white blood cells. That's not good for the body. That is not healthy and normal living. That is leukemia.

The Misguided Desire for Constant Persecution

And sadly, there are plenty of Christians who promote spiritual leukemia as NT Christianity. These people have made the situation for the church in America worse by assuming that the cultural conditions which are most conducive to conversion is persecution, emergency, and sickness.

They think that because the Church thrived during the first century persecution in the Roman Empire, turning the world upside down, that we ought always to be in a state of persecution, because that alone, they think, is the condition which will save the most souls.

Of course they do not tell you what it means to turn the world upside down. It means to turn the world right side up, back to the way it was meant to be. It meant the disciples were preaching that there is another King, Jesus. And even Caesar must repent and obey him.

The Russel Moore's of the world who think that cultural Christianity is wrong, are deeply mistaken. They fail to

realize that if you give up that cultural influence to the pagans, what you get is cultural pagans. You may get some more conversions. But you will also get far more cultural pagans, who are far worse than cultural Christians.

Cultural pagans have a cultural vision. They have a social and political ideology. And, like good pagans, they are going to force it on the rest of society whether you like it or not. And what does their cultural vision look like? It looks like the crazies infected with the woke mind virus who have hi-jacked our metaphorical airplane of civilization and are trying to crash it into the ground. And the Russell Moore's of the world rejoice, for he believes that it will lead to revival.

But the other thing that happens in a majority pagan culture, is that those who were once nominally Christian, will now nominally go along with the pagan culture around them, because, like Christianity once did, it is too socially costly not to.

This is why there is such a rise in support for LGBTQ, diversity, equity, and inclusion, and anti-white hate. These are now the pagan cultural norms which are designed to remove the influence of Christianity from the civilization, and if you refuse to go along with the new pagan culture, then there are cultural and social ramifications that can destroy you.

In a majority pagan culture the people become nominal pagans, just as people were nominal Christians 70 years ago. But now that they are raising their children as nominal pagans, and they are sending their kinds to nominally pagan schools, and they work for nominally pagan institutions, everyone just nominally adopts pagan views and values and practices. And eventually you end up losing Christendom entirely. And what will paganism produce in the world? A Plane Crash.

The Necessity of Christian Cultural Influence

So no. Persecution, and nominal paganism, political marginalization, and social exile for Christians are not good for the church or our neighbors or our nation. Just because God did an amazing work of redemption in a hostile Roman Empire, does not mean that God can only ever work in an environment that is hostile to Christianity.

We have instructions for how to handle persecution, and those instructions ought to be used in emergencies. They are not normative for all times. And thinking otherwise, and praying for persecution to purify the church, and laughing when pagans mock our faith, and saying “good riddance” to cultural Christianity, rejoicing in the break up of marriages, and the paganization of our nation, and the loss of Christian political power is like saying “good riddance” to our health. It is like rejoicing that the plane is

crashing. At least someone will pray to God and be saved before they die, right?

Learning from the Pilgrims and Puritans

People of God, the Bible is such a rich book, and our Christian heritage has produced so many good resources throughout the ages from those who lived in Christendom. We can and should retrieve those writings to help us learn how to save a society that wants to destroy itself, and how to further make that society thoroughly Christian, for the temporal and eternal good of the people.

Our forefathers, the Pilgrims and the Puritans, had to learn the hard way about how to do this very thing. They were persecuted, they fled England, they crossed the Atlantic, landed in a New World, had to survive a freezing winter, learn to get along with the Indians, and build a nation from scratch. And they worked hard to do that for the glory of God, and for the good of their children, and for the advancement of the Kingdom of Jesus.

Embracing Our Heritage

And the foundation of all the beauty, goodness, and truth that we have inherited here in America is because they lived under God's normal operating procedures for establishing a nation. And we ought to make use of every resource that our forefathers in the faith have left us so we

can continue to build up a godly, beautiful, peaceful civilization to the glory of God. We can continue to build up the city on a hill.

We live in a time and place when we should understand that there are crazies trying to crash the plane of civilization. But we should be seeking to save the passengers, but not by only being concerned only about spiritual matters, but also about how live normal civilizational life under God and His word. Not all hope is lost yet. We are in a situation here, where we have opportunity to build on top of the spiritual capital of the Dutch Reformed Christians who built Pella.

Christianity still has some social capital and influence here. And we should want to make sure that we continue to build up that capital, build up that social influence so that our great, great, great grandchildren can receive cultural and spiritual blessings of Christian society. And not just for our children, but also for our unbelieving neighbors. Cultural Christianity is far better than cultural paganism.

We should be seeking to build strong families, establish godly institutions, implement strong biblical justice and righteousness; we should be training architects and engineers to build beautiful buildings and safe bridges and to give us clean water.

We should create realty companies, law firms, medical practices, hospitals, and construction companies. We need police officers, mayors, judges, schools and teachers. We need printing presses, musicians, artists, poets, welders, and authors. We need IT specialists, roofers, plumbers, pastors, firefighters, doctors, nurses, physicians, mechanics, and barbers. And we need governors, senators, representatives, Sheriff's, coroners, and treasurers. And we need brewmasters and distillers, and farmers, and beekeepers, and truckdrivers. We need every single one of you, and more. We need you so we can continue to Christianize our towns, and live according to the reign of Christ on earth, for the temporal and eternal good of our children and our neighbors, in every single area of life.

Let us not take the foolish and immature position of thinking that because the early church went through persecution, that we should be praying for it to come here and now. Look, use the emergency instructions if you need to. But don't think that emergency landings are the normal goal of the Christian life. And don't abandon the flight manual before there is a true emergency.

Do not follow the Russell Moore's of the world who think that loss of Christian influence is a good thing. It's not. I hope and pray that we become men and women of wisdom, who build up a strong and faithful civilization to

the glory of God, for the temporal and eternal good of our children and our neighbors.

Protecting Our Own

People of God, it is good and lawful to want to build and protect our communities and uphold Christian values which benefit our society. But now that we have a pagan society rising up in our midst, and we have compromisers in the church who want to curry favor with them, this means that we need to be bolder in supporting our brothers who are actively engaging in public discourse promoting Christian civilization.

They are participating in political talk, they are working to help the people in the plane to understand that crashing the plane is not good for society, and it is not Christian to support the crashing the plane of civilization, just because we have instructions about what to do in an emergency situation. It is not loving our neighbor, or our enemies, to allow them to crash the plane. So we have people who are working to ensure that the cultural conversation moves in another direction than it currently is. They are wanting the Christians to come around to the belief that our laws and cultural norms should reflect Christian principles. But in a society that is increasingly anti-Christian, just talking about that can be costly.

Defending our families, promoting morality, and fostering godly social norms are commendable and necessary pursuits for believers. It is part of our standard operational procedure for fulfilling the great commission. But the pagans and compromisers are not going to let us do that without a fight.

And so, many in the church today are paralyzed from pursuing this kind of work for fear of being called "racist," "antisemite," or "white supremacist." These are words which in some places can do serious harm. And the enemies know it. So, they wield these words to silence and discredit Christians who stand for biblical truths, who stand for Christian civilization.

And it is this fear of social ostracism and reputational damage that often leads church leaders and their members to unjustly condemn or distance themselves from faithful Christians who are vocal about their convictions.

But, instead of supporting those of us who are striving to uphold Christian values, these church leaders and members join the chorus of criticism in order to avoid the cultural backlash for themselves. And so pastors are defrocked without trial, members are excommunicated without trial, and without ability to address their accusers. People are fired from their jobs.

This fear-driven compromise must be resisted in the church of Jesus Christ, if we are going to rally enough people to help us stop the crazies from crashing the plane into the ground.

Just as Nehemiah stood firm in the face of false accusations and slander and threats, so Christians today must also be steadfast in the face of slander, accusations, and threats. Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem despite persistent lies and threats from his enemies. He refused to be intimidated and refused to give any credence whatsoever to their false accusations and threats. He responded saying, *“No such things as you say are being done, but you invent them in your own heart.”* And he understood why they were doing it. He says:

⁹For they all were trying to make us afraid, saying, “Their hands will be weakened in the work, and it will not be done.”

But Nehemiah prayed, *“But now O God, strengthen my hands.”*

Christians today should not be afraid to emulate this kind of courage and dedication to Christ. We must not yield to false accusations or allow slander to deter us from our mission simply because someone accuses us some social sin. We must understand they are trying to get us to stop

our work. But we must not be afraid. But we must pray for God to strengthen our hands, so we can continue to build.

And as we build, we ought also to defend our fellow believers who are wrongfully attacked for their godly actions. We should also not condemn those are trying to expose the lies and false motives of those who seek to discredit us. By standing firm against fear and compromise, we can maintain the integrity of our witness and continue to work towards rebuilding a Christian Nation that honors God, without fear of being persecuted by the enemy, or by our own people.

Conclusion

May God strengthen the work of our hands so that we may be diligent in our work, steadfast in our faith, and bold in our witness, trusting that God will guide and sustain us as we seek to honor Him in all things.

And let us reject fear and anxiety, and instead boldly and joyfully embrace the normal, God-ordained life of peace, prosperity, and godliness, for the glory of His name and the good of our nation. Amen.