

Hope and obedience in tumultuous times

1 Peter 1 was written to bring comfort, hope and clarity to Christian communities facing trials scattered across what is now Turkey.

Verse 13 of chapter 1 is significant: "Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming."

In the midst of tumultuous times, in the midst of tragedy and loss, in the midst of lives and worlds being turned upside-down, Peter encourages ordinary Christians to be clear-headed and sober-minded.

To get level heads by setting their hope and hearts on the return of Jesus Christ. Peter is inviting ordinary Christians to find their bearing, to find their balance, to find their feet in the hope of the return of Jesus Christ. He's asking them to keep their eyes on the ball, Jesus Christ and his return.

In a real sense Peter is encouraging these early Christians to understand the trials and challenges they are facing biblically and theologically. To recognise the One we worship is risen and returning. It is critical at this time of national tragedy that we commit ourselves to soaking in, and focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ and his return.

This means saying a deeper yes to consistent Bible reading and reflection. It may mean picking up lost habits of Bible engagement. It may also mean being wiser about our social media intake. It means committing ourselves to continuing to quietly and consistently disciple our children.

In verse 14 he gets even stronger, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance."

In the midst of turbulence, in the middle of upheaval, don't revert back to the evil desires that influenced your life before Christ.

Here Peter recognises the reality of evil in the human heart, he recognises that in the trials being faced by the Christian community the potential desire for revenge and retribution and retaliation--and even recognition--are evil.

In moments like these it's possible to allow ourselves a 'Christian rationale' and explain away even the worst of our desires. Especially when the explanations sound so plausible and come from seemingly reputable sources. We must be vigilant.

What is our response in times of trial?

Verse 15 shows us what our response should be: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do".

In a word: Holiness.

How do we live holy lives in light of the horror we've experienced as a nation?

Verses 14 and 15 outline the contours of what holiness looks like. Holiness means recognising the triune God has called us; we don't belong to ourselves, we belong to him.

Holiness means recognising he's called us to be his children, in his family, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He has sealed this call by placing his Spirit with us. Our ultimate aim, therefore, is to reflect his character and our hope through Christ in the power of his Spirit.

Holiness means we don't conform to the desires of wider society. In times of national tragedy and grief we don't conform to simplistic statements, we don't conform to the social media agendas of others, we don't conform to the fear whipped up across the political spectrum both here and abroad. We don't conform to the prejudice and casual racism that rolls underneath New Zealand society.

Holiness means we conform ourselves to the holiness of the triune God and live out the hope he has revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We settle our hearts and our hope in an entirely different place than the wider society. We conform our lives, our parenting, our working, our speaking, and actions to the profound grace of God poured out on us in Jesus. We conform ourselves to God's global multi-cultural, cross-cultural purposes right where we are. We conform ourselves to the grace and truth revealed to us in Jesus Christ. We confirm ourselves to the compassion and clarity embodied in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord.

Obedient to Christ

Lastly being holy means we are obedient to Jesus. We allow ourselves to be taught by his Scripture and led by his Spirit.

In a season of confusion and upheaval for the early Christians, Peter comforts them with the hope they have in their risen Lord and calls them to a holiness shaped by conformity to the triune God.

In this season of upheaval and change across Aotearoa, we too can be comforted by the hope we have in Christ and--at the same time--be obedient to the call of Christ. We can serve across cultural boundaries, we can love across religious boundaries, and we can speak across social boundaries.

Aroha nui,

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