Hi,

Today’s updates:

* This Sunday in my 11am class will be the last in the series, *Living Hope*, as we talk about practicing resurrection and God’s restorative justice. I hope you will join us [on my Facebook page for ministry](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

***Peter 2:11-17; 3:7-11 (NRSV)***

**Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.**

**For the Lord’s sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.**

**Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together, paying honor to the woman as the weaker sex, since they too are also heirs of the gracious gift of life—so that nothing may hinder your prayers.**

**Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For**

**“Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good . . . ”**

This is the fourth in our six-part series on restoring hope in a Time of Virus. Peter’s encouragement to suffering believers has, to this point, focused on themselves, as individuals or as a community. He has reminded them of their Easter hope. He has urged them to be ready for action, to discipline themselves, to embrace anew a holy life. Yesterday, we saw that Peter picked them up and told them that God had called them for a reason, to proclaim God’s mighty acts. Today, Peter turns the believers toward others, not only their families and households, but to all those among whom they lived.

*Living among and with others*

Today’s first passage begins a lengthy section of Peter’s letter, 2:11-4:11, that focuses on how these believers are to live in the midst of indifference and even outright hostility that has led to their alienation and suffering. Should they isolate themselves and build fences within which they can strive to live the Jesus way? Should they march out ready to do battle, at least figuratively, with all who oppose them or have caused them pain and loss?

John Elliot’s reading is that these believers are genuine outcasts from society and that their concern was to form a strong group identity:

For the Christian community, in other words, there exists a different standard of values, namely the will of God in the exemplary obedience of Jesus Christ, which distinguishes it from outside society. In the estimation of the Gentiles, the Christians amount only to a motley collection of lowly aliens, ignoble slaves, religious fanatics and “Christ-lackeys” obsessed with self-humiliation. Within the family of God however, and in God's estimation, Christians enjoy a new status which can only be retained by avoiding conformity to the degrading social norms of the Gentiles.

David Balch, on the other hand, looks at Peter’s “household code” and hears Peter urging these believers to live virtuously as an example to those who persecute them.

David Bartlett rightly notes that these communities probably embraced both perspectives. We sometimes sum this dilemma up with a phrase like, “be in the world but not of the world.” We, like these Christians in Asia Minor, can’t very well just withdraw from the world. Jesus told us to go to the ends of the earth and make disciples. “You are the light of the world,” Jesus told his disciples. “Let your light shine before others . . .”

No, we can’t withdraw from the world, even when tough times might make us feel like we want to. We are to be a witness to others, honoring God in all that we do. We are to be honorable people of a “tender heart and a humble mind,” even as we strive to preserve and to grow not only our families but the body of Christ.

Thus, Peter tells the husbands that they are to honor their wives. The women who are married to unbelievers are to remind themselves that the “purity and reverence” of their lives may win their husbands over to Christ. Slaves are to accept their masters’ authority, even that of masters who are harsh. If they or, for that matter, any believer suffers, they at least know that Christ suffered for them. All are to honor everyone, even the emperor!

In all their relationships, perhaps especially so amidst the tensions and stresses of hardship, the believers are to “have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

*“Doing good”*

In 3:10-11, Peter draws on Psalm 34:12-16 to help the believers see better the shape of this life to which they have been called and which will sustain them through their present hardships. Peterson paraphrases the psalmist’s words this way: “Turn your back on sin, do something good; Embrace peace – don’t let it get away!”

As I reflected on this passage and my own “desire to see good days,” as the psalmist put it, I was drawn to the simple encouragement to do something good. Having survived tougher times in my life than even this pandemic, I know well that it was so tempting to withdraw from the world, to crawl into a corner and lick my wounds.

But Christ calls us to reach out to others, to family and friends, even to strangers. Reach out not so much looking for help, but seeking to provide help, Tough times challenge us to get outside ourselves, to see that there are those who desperately need our help.

*A bit more -- The Weaker Sex??*

There are some (no, many) places in Scripture, such as 1 Peter 3:7, that slap us upside the head, forcing us to remember that these are the writings of people who lived thousands of years ago. They don’t share all our values and sensibilities. Their worldviews, even those of the apostles, varied considerably from our own.

For example, it is difficult for me to really imagine that there was a time when slavery was not only acceptable, but understood to be the “natural” order of things. Paul and Peter lived in such a world. Neither advocated the end of slavery. I doubt either of them envisioned a world without slavery, short of the world’s remaking at the time of Christ’s return. They both had much to say about what it meant to be a *Christian* slave-owner or a *Christian* slave. But the abolition of the institution would take the better part of two millennia and yet, when the movement began, it was begun by Christians.

The same with the place of women in the ancient world. The cultures were patriarchal. Women were poorly educated and expected to largely stay in the private arena of the home. They simply were not seen as being as capable or strong or trustworthy as men. Women couldn’t even testify in a Jewish law court!

When you meet a woman in the Bible who has an active and public life, you can bet that you are meeting a formidable person.

I once heard a lecture by a scholar of ancient Greece and Rome. It was entitled: “Less Than Human: Women and Slaves in the Greco-Roman World.” You hardly need anything but the title to get the lecturer’s point.

Here’s another illustration of my point. Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* is built in part on a foundation of the Gnostic writings of the 2nd-4th centuries, the most well-known of which is the Gospel of Thomas, a 2nd century writing. At the end of the list of Jesus’ supposed secret sayings, Jesus tells Peter that he is going to make Mary Magdalene a male so she can be a “living spirit” like the rest of the guys. Jesus says, “For every female who makes herself male will enter heaven’s kingdom.” The Gnostics, you see, seemed to believe that females were males whose development had been stunted and thus needed to complete their growth to full, kingdom-ready, personhood.

Needless to say, we need to let ourselves be very much surprised whenever the apostles lift a woman to a prominent place in the movement, such as Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia. We need to cheer when Paul writes that, in Christ, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We need to cheer it and then we need to live it!

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott