

Sermon Title – How Should We Then Live?

Scripture Lesson – Micah 6:8 and Isaiah 41:10 for OT reading; I Corinthians 16:13-14

TOD – I am not a Bible-believing Christian in the fullest sense simply by believing the right doctrines, but as I live in practice in this supernatural world. -- Francis Schaeffer

The title of this message is “How Should We Then Live?” Some of you might think that is a strange arrangement of words for a sermon title. Others of you may recognize it as a book and video series by author, philosopher and theologian, Francis Schaeffer, that came out in the late 70’s. How many of you are familiar with it or have read it? I didn’t read it until I spent a winter term at college in the early 80’s and the people that I house-sat for had a copy of it. It was never required reading for any of my courses, and yes – I picked it up and read it for fun.

The full title of the book is “How Should We Then Live? The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture. Schaeffer’s basic premise (from the book flap) is that “not only have we lost sight of our roots, but of our direction as well.” He “pinpoints the problems, researches their origins, and formulates a hopeful, positive proposal for the future.”

The description of the book continues... he “contemplates the reasons for modern society’s very sorry state of affairs and presents the only viable alternative: living by the Christian ethic, acceptance of God’s revelation, and total affirmation of the Bible’s morals, values and meaning.”

Schaeffer traces Western history from Ancient Rome and makes extensive references to art and architecture as a means of showing how these movements reflected changing patterns of thought through time. When we base society on the Bible, on the infinite-personal God who is there and has spoken, this provides an absolute by which we can conduct our lives and by which we can judge society. Another premise is that modern relative values are based on Personal Peace (the desire to be personally unaffected by the world’s problems) and Affluence (an increasing personal income.) He warns that when we live by these values we will be tempted to sacrifice our freedoms in exchange for an authoritarian government who will provide the relative values. He further warns that this government will not be obvious like the fascist regimes of the 20th century but will be based on manipulation and subtle forms of information control, psychology, and genetics. Interesting thoughts in light of what’s happening around us today, right?

I don’t want to spend a lot of time with Schaeffer’s book, as I’m not much of a philosopher, but rather use it as a jumping off point. Fast forward 46 years to today – where do we stand as Christians – I prefer to use “Christ-followers” - in the American/Western culture? The world around us seems to be decaying from the inside out – mixed up moral values, gender orientation issues, woke or cancel culture, violence; the list goes on and on. I am often asked how are we as Christ-followers to live in this day and age.

And some may be wondering why these issues aren’t being addressed by our pastors, our denominational leaders, or other well-known Christian leaders. Why aren’t pastors and

churches speaking about these things? The question that stands before us – How Should We Then Live? is one that many of us may be asking in these days of turmoil and trouble and we feel we need direction.

What I would like to do today is unpack some general ideas from a Biblical perspective on how we should be viewing these matters – from what lens should we be looking through? What should we be focusing upon?

My objective is to give us Scriptural reminders – from Jesus, Paul and other New Testament authors, and some the Old Testament writers as to what God “requires of us.” I want to start by looking at I Corinthians 16:13-14.

Watch! Stand firm in the faith! Be courageous! Be strong! Let all that you do be done in love. (WEB)

This scripture came to me from a verse of the day calendar (on April 29) that my boss gave me for Christmas. I wasn't sure which translation or version it was, but I was finally able to find it in an online bible translation comparison. This is the World English Bible, which is a revision of the American Standard Version (1901), published in 2000. I like the punctuation which emphasizes what Paul is trying to convey.

I'm planning on breaking down this passage and giving other Scripture references to reinforce the action words. I think it's important to ground ourselves in God's Word; I know I personally don't read or memorize enough of Scripture and it's a habit that I am committed to adopt. I would challenge you as you listen, to pick some verses that you want to incorporate into your life as memory verses. Write them down on a card, carry it with you in your wallet, pocket or purse and pull them out when you need to be reminded of God's promises. Let God's Word wash over you. (Don't worry about getting these all down – you'll get the sermon manuscript later this week.)

Our passage for today in I Corinthians is one that I'm currently memorizing. I believe there is power in reading and hearing Scripture read aloud. Just as an aside, I remember when I first started attending ABC in 2012, Pastor Keith was on sabbatical and Matt Williams was preaching while Keith was gone. One of his messages was simply reading from the Bible and I remembered what an impact that made on me.

Verse 13 of I Corinthians begins with:

1) Watch!

Other words used are “Be on your guard”, “be alert or awake/wakeful”

In article by Debbie McDaniel, Walking Wisely in a Dark World, she says of this passage, “The enemy wants nothing more than for us to be asleep in our faith. Let's stay spiritually awake and aware of what surrounds us. God gives us discernment for a reason.”

I Peter 5:8 (New English Translation) which is a translation that I've just discovered

Be sober and alert. Your enemy the devil, *like a roaring lion*, is on the prowl looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8 (The Message)

Keep a cool head. Stay alert. The Devil is poised to pounce, and would like nothing better than to catch you napping. Keep your guard up. You're not the only ones plunged into these hard times. It's the same with Christians all over the world. So keep a firm grip on the faith. The suffering won't last forever. It won't be long before this generous God who has great plans for us in Christ—eternal and glorious plans they are!—will have you put together and on your feet for good. He gets the last word; yes, he does.

1 Peter 4:7-8 (NKJV)

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

Colossians 4:2 (NET)

Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving.

2) Stand firm in the faith!

This means to persist – keep on keeping on!

The Greek term for “stand firm” is a military term meaning to stand your ground, be immovable, hold your position on the front line. All this is to be done while under a heavy assault or attack during battle.

McDaniel writes, “We can't live a watered down gospel for a world that insists we tone it down a bit. We do not have to waver in our beliefs out of a longing to be accepted from the world.”

Psalms 119:89-91 (NIV)

Your word, LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens. Your faithfulness continues through all generations; you established the earth, and it endures. Your laws endure to this day, for all things serve you.

Proverbs 10:25 (NIV)

When the storm has swept by, the wicked are gone, but the righteous stand firm forever.

1 Peter 5:9 (NIV)

Resist him (the devil) and be firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

3) Be courageous!

Some translations use “act like men,” however, this complicates the phrase's meaning. The phrase “act like men” translates a single Greek word which means to act in a courageous and virtuous manner. In this sense, the word “act courageously” has masculine overtones but

should be applied to women as well since it carries a universally attribute: namely, courage or virtue.

Joshua 1:9 (NET)

I repeat, be strong and brave! Don't be afraid and don't panic, for I, the LORD your God, am with you in all you do."

II Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. In this verse, the opposite of fear and timidity is Brave.

Philippians 1:20 (CEV)

I honestly expect and hope I will never do anything to be ashamed of. Whether I live or die, I always want to be as brave as I am now and bring honor to Christ.

4) Be Strong!

Going back to McDaniel's commentary, she says "the word used here means 'to keep increasing in strength.' Not in our own strength, but in the power of the Spirit of God. He makes our footsteps firm, He makes our way strong."

I Chronicles 16:11 (NLT)

Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him.

Isaiah 12:2 (NET)

Look, God is my deliverer!
I will trust in him and not fear.
For the LORD gives me strength and protects me;
he has become my deliverer."

Psalms 27:14 (NLT)

Wait for the Lord. Be strong. Let your heart be strong. Yes, wait for the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10 (NIV)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Let's pause here - we'll get to verse 14 in moment.

I want to briefly address the 2nd question I mentioned at the beginning of this message. While it may be a bit difficult to see how the two questions go together, I hope that you'll be able to see the correlation between the two.

Why aren't these issues (politics, culture, etc.) being addressed publicly by our pastors, our denominational leaders, or other well-known Christian leaders. Why aren't pastors and churches speaking about these things?

The following statement is one that describes a webinar that I watched entitled: "Should Your Church Get Political?" that was sponsored by Christianity Today. It was a roundtable discussion of panelists to educate and inform pastors and church leaders on how God may be calling them to lead in the face of the current political climate.

Pastors and churches in America have struggled for decades to determine how much political involvement they can or should engage in. There are legal and theological questions surrounding this topic. There are also pastoral questions regarding when or how the engagement of political issues is necessary to disciple congregants.

In case you might be interested in watching this, you can find it on The Seed's website (show slides?), under the tab "Politics with a ?" (TheSeed.Online) There are also some interesting resources on racial justice posted under Faith Builders.

As I watched the webinar, I felt that it was a well-rounded and thought out presentation by the group of panelists, which ranged from pastors to lawyers to an academic. A young one, I might add who had some brilliant discussion points. She wrote a book recently, which I'm thinking about reading, *"The Liturgy of Politics: Spiritual Formation for the Sake of Our Neighbor."* She *"insists that the way out of our political morass is first to recognize the formative power of the political forces all around us, and then to recover historic Christian practices that shape us according to the truth of the gospel."* end quote

One of the pastors stated that Christians have unique privileges and responsibilities here in the US, that most other countries do not. He describes politics as "being able to leverage our unique power and responsibilities as citizens to love our neighbor by guiding the government towards human flourishing."

Another panelist stated that there seems to be a "cultural convulsion" that happens at least once in a generation. Considering that we seemed to have just gone through one (or maybe we're still in the middle of it), some pastors may feel ill-equipped to address the issues from the pulpit. Or that there are so many issues, they don't know where to start. One of the lawyers expressed concern that there is tremendous pressure on pastors – some people think they need to find a new church if their pastor doesn't address current societal issues in a timely manner! He also stated that this is not a healthy perspective to be carrying. I would add that if there is something that you feel our pastor or someone else should be addressing, don't stew about it – do some research on your own; there are some good sources out there. Be open to hearing voices from other perspectives. And yes, talk to Pastor Keith or another person in church leadership about your concerns.

There are Christian leaders who are speaking out, one just needs to find them – mainstream media certainly won't promote them. But those leaders who do speak out need to be careful of what they say, how they say it and how they portray others with whom they don't agree.

I was a bit disturbed by an email that a pastor had written concerning the Roe v Wade decision. He included what I thought were scathing comments about other Christians.

[this is the part that I cut out...]

from Pathways to Victory that I got this past Friday. It was written by Dr. Robert Jeffers, who is billed as a Southern Baptist pastor in Dallas as well as a Fox News contributor, concerning the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. These comments comprise about half of the email:

“The overturn of *Roe* is also an affirmation of the right and responsibility of Christians to get involved in the political process. There is only one reason *Roe* was overturned: in 2016, conservative Christians worked together to elect Donald Trump, and President Trump kept his promise to appoint pro-life justices to the Supreme Court. Had Hillary Clinton been elected—as some Christians hoped would happen—*Roe* would still be the law of the land today.

This week’s historic ruling is a reminder that elections have consequences. Elected leaders determine policies that can influence the moral and spiritual direction of a country. In the 1940s, German Christians (with only a few exceptions) remained silent as Adolf Hitler rose to power and murdered six million Jewish people. Thankfully, Christians in our country have refused to remain silent about the holocaust of unborn children. Together, they effected a leadership change that in turn resulted in a policy change that will save millions of lives.” end quote

Of course we know that the outcome of the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* is not over, but I think there’s a danger in some of the comments that he made.]

In our study in Life Group this past spring, Romans 13 talked about Submission to Civil Government. As we discussed this passage in our group, I recounted how the radio station that I listen to has a segment each day that includes prayer for a different member of our federal government. That day the person just happened to be Kamala Harris. I said, “O Lord, I don’t know if I can pray for her.” Then I was reminded of, or rather convicted by, the passage in 1 Timothy:

I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. Ask God to help them; intercede on their behalf, and give thanks for them. Pray this way for kings and all who are in authority so that we can live peaceful and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 NLT

So I said the prayer along with the person on the radio.

When we pray for our leaders we take part in advancing God’s kingdom on this earth. Here are some of the ways to pray for those in leadership that can impact God’s influence on the earth:

- Pray for our leaders’ salvation and/or heart change.
- Pray for wisdom in making good decisions according to God’s leading.
- Pray that their decisions and influence have a positive impact on our families, cities, churches, laws, schools, and more.

(<https://www.gominno.com/parents/what-does-the-bible-say-about-praying-for-our-leaders/>)

I also have an Our Daily Bread booklet “God and Government: Following the Wisdom of the Bible.” It very clearly lays out the biblical teaching on respecting authority, but also when your heart must follow God. From the words of Christ and the apostle Paul, there are two pillars that address our dual citizenship.

1. We must know what belongs to God.
2. We must know what God has entrusted to the state.

“We must find a balance. We must temper our need for social accountability... with an awareness that governments—like all human institutions—will fall short of the purposes for which they were established.” It also states, that “if we must resist, we need to do so with respect for the people who govern.” I would highly recommend this booklet if you have questions about how to do this.

Which leads us back to I Corinthians 16:14.

5) Let all that you do be done in love.

McDaniel says - “That pretty much sums it all up. Our calling. Our purpose in this life. Everything we do, all that we say, should be done in love. Pointing others to Him. Love God. Love others. It's the very love of Christ that compels us, may we walk in a manner worthy of His calling.”

I Peter 3:15-16 (NIV)

But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

Phil 2:14-16 a (NIV)

Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.”[Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

The first passage that Martha read, Micah 6:8, lays out another imperative list of how God expects us to live:

This is what God asks (requires) of you, only this...

To act justly

Love tenderly

To walk humbly with your God.

That same night at LifeGroup someone said we should be more about what we're **for**, rather than what we're **against**. Yes, we should be firm in what we know to be sin. But the

admonition to love tenderly – let all that you do be done in love – with respect – carries more weight and influence than we can ever imagine. That is the power of God’s love in us.

Allow me to read this post that I found on Facebook a couple of months ago. Please know that I’m not advocating for or expressing support for Facebook, but I’ve been finding things popping up in my newsfeed that are generally inspirational and show up at just the right time.

This was on the page called “Sad Jesus” and was written by Rachel Held Evans. She was an American Christian columnist, blogger and author, who unfortunately died in 2019 at the age of 37. She was somewhat controversial with some of her viewpoints towards the end of her life, but she makes a good point in this article.

"I've been watching people with golden crosses around their necks and on their lapels shout at the TV about how serving gay and lesbian people is a violation of their “sincerely-held religious beliefs.”

And I can't help but laugh at the sad irony of it.

Two-thousand years ago, Jesus hung from that cross, looked out on the people who put him there and said, "Father, forgive them." Jesus served sinners all the way to the cross.

The truth is, evangelical Christians have already "lost" the culture wars. And it's not because the "other side" won or because evangelicals have failed to protect our own religious liberties. Evangelicals lost the culture wars the moment they committed to fighting them, the moment they decided to stop washing feet and start waging war.

And I fear that we've lost not only the culture wars, but also our Christian identity, when the "right to refuse" service has become a more sincerely-held and widely-known Christian belief than the impulse to give it." (end quote)

I've often said, and you may share this belief as well... God did not put US on the earth to judge other people. That is reserved only for Him. We are called to love others – and others include those who do not share our theological worldview or our moral values. There is to be no exception – if God loves all people, and we see in Scripture that He does, then how can we do less? I don't know about you but I'd rather look like Jesus than be viewed as a member of an out-of-date or maybe out-of-touch institution. I'll admit that it is hard to change what has been so ingrained in me since childhood.

So where does that leave us today? I talked about how we are to be living as Christ-followers, but perhaps we need (I know I need) to be reminded about who's ultimately in charge of the world around us.

Some of you remember David Letterman and his top-ten lists. Well here's a list I found on Facebook that I think we all need to remember.

**Here is my list of
reasons I am not
panicking with what's
going on in the world
right now:**

1) Jesus

I want to finish this message with Scripture focusing upon God's promises.

Our second OT Testament reading for today was Isaiah 41:10

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

John 14:7 (WEB)

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, I give to you. Don't let your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful.

I John 4:4-6 (The Message)

My dear children, you come from God and belong to God. You have already won a big victory over those false teachers, for the Spirit in you is far stronger than anything in the world. These people belong to the Christ-denying world. They talk the world's language and the world eats it up. But we come from God and belong to God. Anyone who knows God understands us and listens. The person who has nothing to do with God will, of course, not listen to us. This is another test for telling the Spirit of Truth from the spirit of deception.

A doctor I follow says that "Knowledge is the *application* of information." Or we've probably heard the definition of head knowledge versus heart knowledge. Author Jamie Morgan says that "Reflecting on what God has spoken to you will turn head knowledge into *deep* heart revelation."

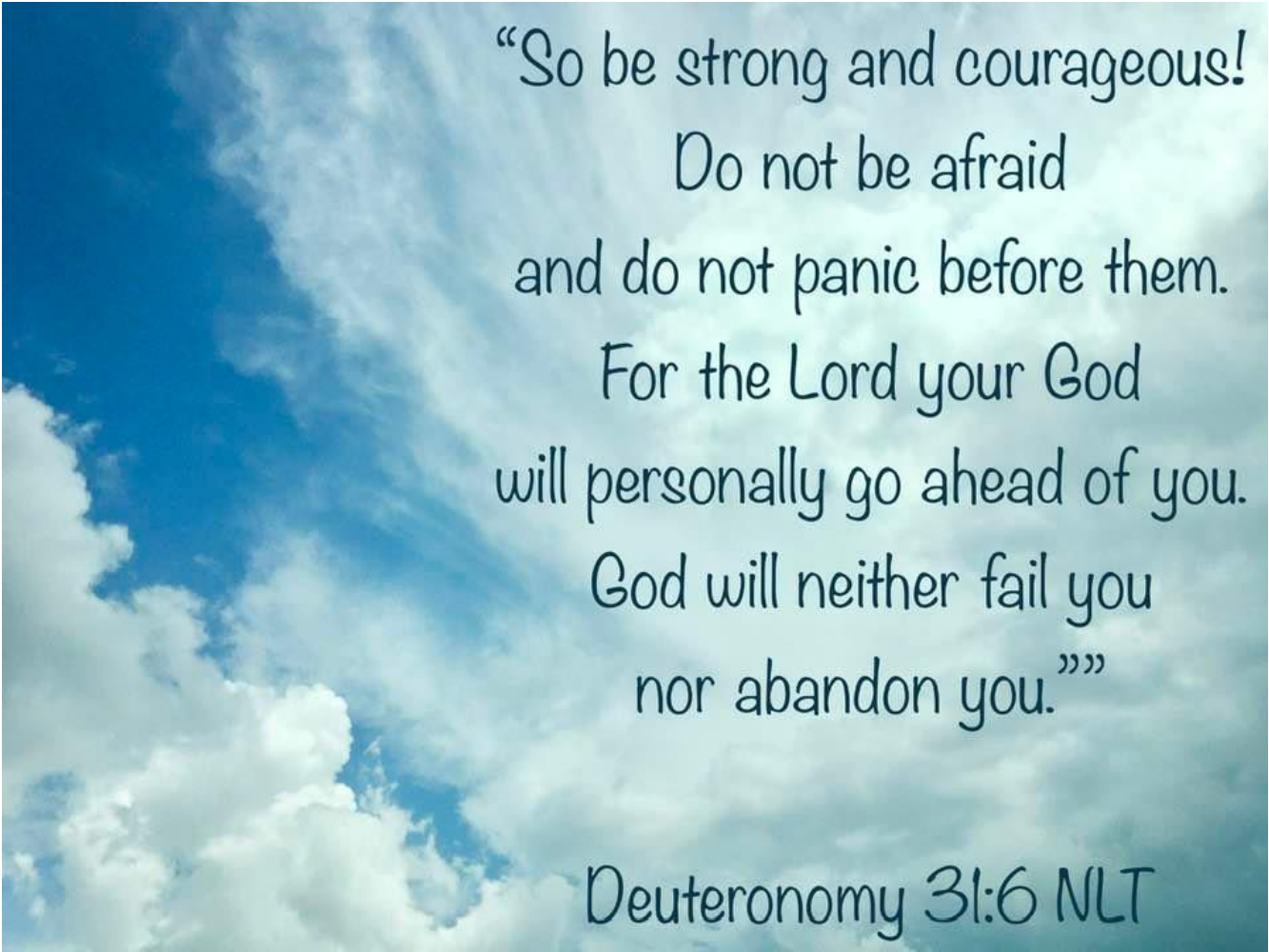
Friends, let us take to heart – deep in our hearts – God's voice, His Word, His strength, His Spirit, His peace.

I hope that you've heard the purpose of this message – we have our role to play in living out our lives here on earth, but God has the ultimate control and we should want God's voice to be the loudest in our lives right now. Not the voices of this world, or the news or social media.

I'm going to end this message with a prayer from Pastor Allen French (Church of Christ, Overland Park, KS), then we'll have the closing music which is a video, Christ Our Hope in Life and Death. If you know it, sing along. The chorus is easy enough to pick up. Let's carry out this promise today and everyday and keep our focus on Jesus.

Heavenly Father, As we rise to a new day our heart is filled with great peace. The peace that comes from You, and is beyond human understanding. We ask that You would help us to walk in Your light today. Touch our hearts and make us an instrument of Your peace. Help us to know Your ways, Lord, teach us Your paths. How grateful we are for Your Holy Spirit and precious word, which You use to set us free from worry and give us peace. It is a great comfort to know that with You beside us, and Your arms around us, we can face whatever lies ahead. Keep us on the path that You would have us walk today as the Holy Spirit continues to lead our way. In Jesus name we pray, amen...

Benediction:



“So be strong and courageous!
Do not be afraid
and do not panic before them.
For the Lord your God
will personally go ahead of you.
God will neither fail you
nor abandon you.””

Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT