

Hallelujah! Who Shall Part?*William Dickinson (?–1889)*

Hallelujah! Who shall part
 Christ's own church from Christ's own heart?
 Sever from the Savior's side
 Souls for whom the Savior died?
 Dash one precious jewel down
 From Immanuel's blood-bought crown?

Hallelujah! Shall the sword
 Part us from our glorious Lord?
 Trouble dark or dire disgrace
 E'er the Spirit's seal efface?
 Famine, nakedness, or hate,
 Bridge and Bridegroom separate?

Hallelujah! Life nor death,
 Powers above nor powers beneath,
 Monarch's might, nor tyrant's doom,
 Things that are, nor things to come,
 Men nor angels, e'er shall part
 Christ's own church from Christ's own heart.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Patience***Kevin T. Bauder*

As I write this essay, the 2020 presidential election is still undecided. After two days of counting, some states are still not certain which candidate won—and until those counts are complete, their votes in the electoral college are hanging in the balance. Neither candidate presently has enough to win the presidency.

The state of Minnesota has endured more than seven months of restrictions related to COVID-19. My church canceled its prayer meeting last evening because the virus was confirmed within the congregation. At work I wear a mask whenever I step out of my office. I'm also a chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol, where masks have become mandatory for all meetings and activities.

My daughter and son-in-law live in Toronto. The border has now been closed for months. My wife and I have not been able to visit them face-to-face all year, and that situation doesn't look like it's going to change any time soon. I've been told that Canada will allow Americans to visit immediate family, but only if they can guarantee a stay of fifteen days or more. That's out of the question for us.

A beloved friend appears to be spinning out of control in his spiritual life. He is engaging in the very kind of destructive behavior against which he has warned others. I've tried to remain his friend because a friend loves at all times. Still, his choices are making our relationship increasingly difficult.

Churches that I care about are suffering. Some of them don't know how to respond to COVID-related governmental mandates. Others have shrunk to the point that they can no longer support a pastor. Some have become divided and are threatening to split or close. Unlike Paul, I am not charged with the care *of* the churches, but I still care *about* these churches. It pains me to see them drifting, divided, or declining.

In none of the above am I unique.

Many others are presently facing these same kinds of pressures. Some are enduring much worse. Some have endured severe personal illness—or have watched their loved ones go through it. Some have suffered bereavements. Some are struggling in their callings. Some have faced betrayals and aban-



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donments. Compared to what these people are enduring, my little afflictions pale to petty annoyances.

Nor are these pressures unique to our age. I've just finished reading Augustine's *City of God*, written at a time of invasion when Christian women were asking whether it was better to commit suicide than to endure rape. I have never (yet) had to face grinding poverty, a totalitarian government, the depredations of war, or the humiliation of imprisonment. Compared to most people through most of the world's history, my life has been one of unimaginable peace and prosperity.

Nevertheless, the stresses of the present are real. They are also widely shared. Perhaps you feel them yourself. If so, then the question for us is how we should face these perplexities.

May I suggest that the first answer is *prayer*? Perhaps this answer is too obvious to have to state, but God expects us to pray. God responds to prayer. Prayer was a regular feature of Jesus' ministry. It was also prominent in the lives of the apostles, especially Paul. We should be bringing up our concerns in our regular prayer (*proseuche*). These concerns should also be spilling over into our desperation prayer (*deēsis*). We should pray for our situations and for ourselves. We should also pray for each other. I'm not too proud to say it: I wish you would pray for me.

The second answer is to revisit our duties. When stresses increase, they tend to distract us from the things that matter most. We need regularly to return to the question, "What are my duties?" If I wish to be a good Christian, a good husband, a good father, a good minister, and a good professor, then I become responsible for an entire list of obligations. I dare not allow myself to be drawn away from these matters by concerns that may be immediate but are really secondary—if I can do anything about them at all. I must make sure that the most important concerns get addressed.

The third answer is that we should take heart. In fact, we should be brimming over with hope. Our hope has sure foundations. It is grounded in the Providence of God, who works all things according to the counsel of His will and who causes all things to work together for good for us. Our hope is also grounded in the fact that God has given us permission to cast all our cares upon Him, for He cares for us. There is no point worrying and wasting emotional energy on matters that are completely beyond my control but that God has well in hand.

The fourth answer is that we need to encourage one another. Discouragement leads to despondency, and despondency to despair. To despair is to say that we are beyond God's reach—and that is neither right nor true. We need to remind each other that God is still working in our lives. We need to assure each other that none of us stands alone. We need to bear one another's burdens, and we also need to hold one another to account. Each of

us should stop worrying about where we will find encouragement; on the contrary, each of us should commit himself to becoming a font of encouragement to others. Nothing is more encouraging than to be used to encourage someone else.

In sum, when we are faced with hardship, we must show patience. Endurance is the name of the game. James says that a farmer plants a field, but he must then wait for the crop. While he is waiting he may feel as if little useful is happening, but the crop is growing. Our job is to endure, i.e., to keep doing what we need to be doing, unto the coming of the Lord. His return is drawing nearer. It is approaching one day at a time, and we must persevere one day at a time. Whoever is elected president. Whether or not we can hold prayer meeting. Even if we must wear masks. Or miss family. Or watch friends disintegrate and ministries decline. Prayer. Duty. Hope. Courage. Patience. Today. Tomorrow. Until Jesus comes.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
