

Bearing up under Persecution

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Matt. 24v9 Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's *(character and authority's)* sake.

Initially this statement may seem to be something very unpleasant to worry about. However we should have a balanced view upon this subject and not be intimidated by this statement.

The Bible has more to say on this subject:-

2Tim. 3v12 Indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.

So The Bible (further supported at John's Gospel chapters 13 to 17) is telling us that if we believe in God's Word and try to follow what Jesus taught us then our life is likely to be difficult within this world. We are likely to perhaps at some stage in our life to face some sort of persecution from this worldly system if we show our true association with Jesus Christ.

But while this may be true, we are given much hope in The Bible to look forward for deliverance from these worldly pressures with the power of the Holy Spirit.

2Tim. 3v1-5 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, fierce, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of religion but denying the power of it.

Perhaps persecution will occur due to your faith. However insight from The Bible about what will happen in the future will give us strength to face these problems and persecution.

What forms will persecution take?

1. Public Persecution.

If we have blessings from The Almighty God (as The Bible promises) then we will also have persecutions from Satan. We only need look at the afflictions that Paul had to suffer during his life.

Mark 10v29-30 Jesus said: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life".

This is the reward that True Christians long for. They left their worldly inducements to follow (imitate) Jesus, knowing that they will receive things one hundred fold in The Millennium as Kings/Priests being Sons of God.

Rom. 8v35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered". No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We can separate ourselves from God by turning away, so we must be careful and follow God's precepts to maintain this bond of principled love. Many false and thus very worldly religious leaders say that this text is one that tells us that God loves us always - but this is a lie. They conveniently forget to place the quote within context where it adds we must be "into Christ Jesus", and thus follow the precepts that Christ Jesus showed us; for us then to receive this love from God. Thus we must imitate Jesus in our lives and it is through us doing precisely this means that Yahweh God by principle loves us. This reasoning then reinforces other Biblical text which tells us that God will destroy many humans in the end - does that mean He loves them? Clearly Not!

2Cor. 12v10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities; for when I am weak *(in the flesh)*, then I am strong *(because I know that Yahweh will come in and support me with His infinite power)*.

Thus as we read, Paul had suffered many hardships, and often he would have felt physically and mentally weak. But immediately he would realise that he is not by himself, but Almighty God would lift him up and then be his shield and sword. And so who then can stand against Almighty God? Clearly no-one, hence you become strong!

2. Family Opposition.

Matt. 10v34-38 Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother

more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Here we can see different divisions of persecutions. The family will be broken up if members of it take opposite stands on the subject of True Christianity. It can be more difficult with this type of persecution because these particular people say: We **love** you! It can be more difficult than persecution from outside. However as True Christians we must not return like with like, but 'turn the other cheek' and still try to help them to understand the true meaning of Christianity. 1Pet. 3v9 Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.

He is setting the example not to go reviling in turn. Just as quoted in 1Pet. 2v22-23, Jesus set the example for us all.

Rom. 12v17-20 Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written: Vengeance is mine, I will repay. Says the Lord.

Extending it from the family to government, they may in some circumstances deprive you of your home, fine you, imprison you or just ban you from your activities.

Be careful though because many people may think in a self-righteous manner that they have gone a long way in the service of Jesus Christ but Paul warns us in his letter to the Corinthians. He says 'sarcastically' but in a friendly way states:-

1Cor. 5v8 Already you are filled! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!

Paul then goes on to say what he and fellow apostles have had to experience in their own life!

1Cor. 5v9 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death: because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and men.

Paul now compares the apparent contradiction between them and the 'puffed-up' Corinthians:-

1Cor. 5v10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honour, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are ill-clad and buffeted and homeless, and we labour, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become, and are now, as the refuse of the world, the off-scourings of all things.

Paul clearly shows us in this passage that we must be very careful in how we personally award marks to ourselves. We must not think that we are greater than we really are!

How should you feel and react, if persecution is pulling you down?

Heb. 10v34-36 For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

Matt. 5v44-45 But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

2Cor. 11v24-28 Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea.. On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger in the sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Perhaps and hopefully we will never have to lose all our possessions, or face the severe persecution that Paul had to contend with, however we can be confident that during sufferings for and in the name/character/authority of Jesus Christ then we will have that confidence for what is promised to us.

We have the confidence also, of the promise that God has made to us:-

1Cor. 10v13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you might endure it.

1John 5v4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Essentially faith/fidelity/assurance that Jesus Christ **is** the Son of The Almighty God and our own personal desire to carry out the requirements of The Almighty God will conquer all!

We must be careful. Think of the example of Job and his three false comforters. All these three people did was to make Job feel much worse! They told him that he must have done something wrong, when clearly Job had not done anything wrong! I personally have been on the receiving end of "this type of comforting" - this is what you should do, etc, etc, when in reality there is absolutely nothing that you can do because you have already scrutinised all possible routes

hundreds of times before! I can assure you that this type of 'kindness and concern' over many years cuts right through into your life/soul like a jagged knife!

The First Century Christians had to face tremendous hardships. Especially when Saul (later to become the apostle Paul) went out to collect them to imprison and persecute them! These people were only just like us, with the same human abilities, same pain threshold, families etc, so could we ask ourselves:-

Could we endure these forms of persecution as they did?

Things that they had to endure:-

1. Loss of employment.
2. Prolonged persecution by verbal reviling.
3. Physical abuse.

These are just as common today!

Other things that we must guard against would be: 'Questionable behaviour'.

1Pet. 2v19-20 If one is mindful of God and he endures pain while suffering unjustly then this is approved. If when you do wrong and take the beating for it patiently, what credit to you is it? But if when you do right and suffer for it, then you have God's approval if you take it patiently.

1Pet. 4v15-16 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a (*True*) Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God.

Hence we cannot blame things like a 'parking ticket' or 'speeding fine' as persecution or punishment upon us because this is self-inflicted, caused directly by ourselves!

Hence these early Christians suffered the persecution because they first thought about it and then knew that they were correct to Yahweh's Desire of them. That only Jesus Christ has the right to rule us on this earth, proved by his actions while in human form.

However many modern 'worldly wise' Christian leaders tell us that the United Nations should rule over us to produce international stability and so solve the world's problems! Thus these religious leaders look to the world of Satan rather than forwards and thus promote Yahweh's Acceptable Year of The Millennium under Jesus' righteous rule – which is what they are commanded to do! This shows 'Who' they really represent!

I think that it would be so sad if while during the vast majority of our life we respected and obeyed God's commands, then during a tiny period of our life, we failed under persecution!

James 1v2-6 Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

With God's promise that He will provide an escape route before we buckle under persecution, we know that from other passages in The Bible that:- Just as a father who loves his son will chastise him, so God will to us. The Bible also tells us that we will be refined through fire like the purification of Gold. Fire is painful and I know from personal experience through my many persecutions it has made me much more conscious and mindful of other people's position. Without this persecution I would be just a spoilt, nasty human being, like a child with no future!

Prayer is a very important thing in our life. We must use this like a telephone where we communicate in a rational way, passing on our conscious thoughts and feelings to Almighty God. I would hasten to add that 'speaking in tongues' in sincere prayer does not edify you or Almighty God! How can it, if you don't know what you are saying!

Prayer builds up our expectation to face the problems that beset us. It forces us to use this time to speak truthfully and honestly before our Creator and ask for guidance, because Jeremiah tells us that we do not even know how to put one foot in front of the other as we walk through our life. This communication will benefit our spiritual need so that our strength becomes stronger to face the trials and tribulations in front of us.

1John 5v14-15 And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

Heb. 10v39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith/fidelity/assurance and keep their life/souls.

Heb. 12v2-3 Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Paul give this as an example of Jesus Christ resisting sin unto death. We should try to follow this example even though it is very unlikely that we would be faced with such persecution. Even though this is so, we should still keep this in our sights!

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that looking after ourselves today should be our concern, and not worrying about the things that may, or may not affect us tomorrow (Matthew 6v24-34).

And further Peter tells us:-

1Pet. 5v6-9 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

These are lovely words to comfort us as we look forward with longing beyond these current persecutions to the promise given to us by Jesus. So we should count ourselves worthy to be persecuted in these “last days” of Satan’s worldly system.