

Text: Philippians 1:29

I. The Reality of Persecution

- A. The emphasis in Scripture: words “persecute,” “suffer,” “trials,” “afflictions” occur over 150 times in Scripture.
- B. The ultimate goal when believers are persecuted is for God to be glorified in the believer’s testimony. (1 Peter 4:14)
- C. The reason for persecution consists of both Satan’s and the world’s opposition to God’s righteousness. (John 15:18-20)
 - 1. Those who reflect God’s righteous character are promised both persecution (John 15:19-20; 2 Tim. 3:12) and a special blessing (Matthew 5:10).
 - 2. Sometimes government officials persecute Christians because they are perceived as a threat to nationalistic harmony and customs (Esther 3:8)
- D. The stages of persecution
 - 1. False accusations and slander (Mt. 5:11; John 8:48)
 - 2. Ostracism (Luke 6:22; John 16:2)
 - 3. Illegal taking of property (Heb. 10:34)
 - 4. Illegal arrests and beatings (Acts 12:3-5; 16:20-24)
 - 5. Illegal death (Mt. 14:3-12; Acts 7:54-60; 12:1-2)

II. Biblical Perspective on Persecution

- A. General Considerations
 - 1. Both the Old and New Testaments present the reality that a righteous lifestyle involves a risk of opposition, physical harm, and even death (Luke 10:3).
 - 2. There is a cost attached to being a follower of Christ—that of consciously each day deciding to take up an instrument of death (a cross) (Luke 9:23).
 - 3. When one has considered himself dead to the world, physical death has no hold over him. The ultimate goal is not to stay alive, but to be faithfully bearing witness to the Truth (Galatians 6:14; Philippians 1:20; Revelation 12:11).
- B. Suffering for righteousness’ sake is a privilege given by God to the believer (Acts 5:41).
 - 1. It provides an opportunity for the believer to demonstrate to the world the “power-in-weakness” dynamic which is counter-intuitive (2 Corinthians 12:9-10; 13:4).
 - 2. It provides an opportunity for the believer to identify with Christ’s sufferings (Romans 8:17; Phil. 3:10).
 - 3. It provides an opportunity to grow the believer’s trust in His God (Ps. 119:71).
 - 4. It provides an opportunity for the believer to gain boldness in declaring Christ (Acts 4:29).
 - 5. It provides an opportunity for the believer to overcome the fear of death and to face it with joy (Matthew 10:28; 2 Timothy 4:7-8).
 - 6. It provides an opportunity for the believer to learn to demonstrate love and compassion for his enemies (Matt. 5:44; 1 Cor. 4:12; 1 Peter 3:9).

7. It provides an opportunity to purify and grow the church (Acts 8:2-4; 16:19-40).

III. Persecution in the Old Testament Era

- A. Abel was killed by his evil brother, Cain (Genesis 4:8; I John 4:12).
- B. Moses and Israelites were persecuted by Pharaoh (Exodus 2-12; Hebrews 11:25).
- C. Faithful prophets were persecuted by unrighteous Jewish kings and Gentile kings.
- D. Hebrews documents numerous types of persecution inflicted on faithful OT believers “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:36-38).

IV. Persecution in the New Testament Era

- A. Christ predicted persecution of His faithful believers.
 - 1. As an opportunity to follow in His footsteps (John 15:18-20)
 - 2. As an opportunity for special blessings (Mt. 5:10; Mark 10:29-30)
 - 3. As an opportunity for great reward in heaven (Luke 6:22-23)
 - 4. As a test of true discipleship (Mt. 13:21)
 - 5. As an opportunity to bear testimony for Christ’s name sake both to law enforcement officials and to heads of state (Luke 21:12-16).
 - Stephen’s stoning was one step in bringing Paul to conviction of his sin and to seeing his need of salvation (Acts 7:58-8:1).
 - 6. As an opportunity for Christ to identify with His people (Acts 9:4).
- B. John the Baptist and Jesus were both persecuted and killed.
- C. Persecution in the Early Church

V. Proper Responses to Persecution

- A. Moving locations to escape persecution is legitimate (Acts 8:1; Matt. 10:23).
- B. When arrested for righteousness’ sake, it is proper to appeal to the government to enforce one’s rights be protected from unjust treatment (Acts 22:24-29).
- C. There should be ongoing intercession for persecuted believers because we are members of the same Body (Acts 12:5; Eph. 6:18-20; Heb. 13:3)
- D. Those who face government trials should demonstrate genuine respect and humility before the authorities (Acts 24:5; 26:2-3).
- E. The believer can confidently expect the Holy Spirit to provide the proper words to use in bearing witness to the Truth before officials (Mark 13:9-11).
- F. Silence under interrogation is proper, but lying is not (Genesis 12:10-20; Luke 23:8-9).
- G. Every effort should be taken to refuse to deny Christ, or to betray family members and other believers (Matthew 10:33; 27:12-14).
- H. Unfortunately, under persecution there are some who deny Christ and become “lapsed” Christians (Matthew 13:20-21; I John 2:19).

Conclusion: Since Christ took the greatest risk to come to earth for our redemption, we should be willing to take risks for the Gospel. There is great joy in seeing God glorified through the suffering of His faithful servants who live out the “power-in-weakness” dynamic. Wonderful promises are given to believers to motivate us to maintain an eternal focus. Whatever afflictions we may endure in this life for Christ are only light and temporary, in order to produce a far greater and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17).