
HOW TO MANAGE CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION AND FALSE ACCUSATIONS

MATTHEW 5:11-12

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INTRODUCTION

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. {Matthew 5:11-12 (NIV)}

The purpose of our discussion is to consider how we should handle persecution, insults and false accusation of all kinds of evil because our calling as Christians. Perpetuators of such evil hope we will surrender or compromise our stand for truth or commit some other sin that discredits us. If we yield to their traits, then the persecutor (and their grand master, Devil) has had their way.

So, how do we remain strong, resolute and serve God without falling away and without sinning, despite these pressures? What steps can we take to deal with these persecutions?

EXPECT PERSECUTION

We should expect persecutions as Christians. If we expect persecution, we will not be shocked when it happens; thus, will give us good leverage to respond appropriately and not being in

surprise mode. Imagine straying into a forest that is full of poisonous snakes.....one will know how to react if he sees one, should the fore knowledge of the danger ahead is known!

All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (**2 Timothy 3:12**). We should not have an irrational or delusional belief that other people are trying to harm or conspire against us or unfairly accusing people of persecution. But neither should we think, "It won't happen to me or us." It can and it will happen, if you serve God faithfully - **Matthew 10:34-37** – says Jesus came to bring a sword.

He expected opposition. As a Christian, you should not expect to have peace with everyone around you. A man's enemies may include his dearest loved ones. But we must love Jesus more than we love even earthly family members.

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me,

they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me". {John 15:18-21 –NIV}

If we act like the world, worldly people will not hate us. But if we are faithful, they will persecute us like they did to our Master - Jesus Christ. Jesus warned us so we would know what to expect. When it happens, we can remember that He predicted it, so we will not stumble. (**1 Thessalonians 3:3,4**). One of the reasons Christians stumble at persecution is that they are not ready for it. Maybe they expect the life of Christians to be easy and rosy. When people accuse them of sin, hatred, cowardice, hypocrisy, false teaching, etc., their faith is shaken. They wonder what they did wrong.

We also should not provoke people by displaying bad attitudes or deliberately angering them; example in our preaching and outreach programs. But if we act right, persecution will still come. When it does, rather than feeling guilty or backing down, we should realize this is what God promised. The examples and teachings of faithful Christians prick the conscience of people in sin. They can discredit us or intimidate us to keep quiet, all in an effort to falter us, yielding to such plans of the wicked, will make them successful in their evil ploy. So, we should expect such treatment as long as we do right.

LOVE AND TRUST GOD

Persecution is a reality that many Christians face around the world. Whether it's discrimination, harassment, or even physical violence, being a follower of Christ can sometimes come with a price. In these difficult times, it can be challenging to know how to respond and handle the persecution that comes our way. However, as Christians, we can find comfort and strength in trusting in God's sovereignty.

We must trust God for help to handle persecution; going alone could be catastrophe failure. Proverbs 3:5,6 encourages us to – Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. The Psalmist in **56:11** says – *In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?*

It's easy to be overwhelmed when we face threats and dangers. But we must remember whose side we are on. If God is pleased with us, what does it matter who is upset or angry with us?

1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us that – *No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.* When Jesus was reviled, rather than taking vengeance on His tormentors, He committed Himself to

the righteous judge. He relied on God to deal with the problem. (**1 Peter 2:21-23**).

Let those who suffer according to the will of God continue in doing good and commit their souls for safe keeping to a faithful Creator. Notice that loving and trusting Jesus requires doing good, doing the right thing. Love and trust are fundamental but must lead to action on our part. *“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”* (**1 Peter 4:19**)

PRAY TO GOD

One of the most powerful examples of responding to persecution with love and forgiveness is found in the life of Jesus himself. Despite facing intense persecution, including betrayal, false accusations, and ultimately crucifixion, Jesus responded with love and forgiveness towards his persecutors. In the midst of his suffering, he prayed for those who were crucifying him, saying, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*

This example serves as a powerful reminder for Christians facing persecution today. When we are faced with persecution, it can be tempting to respond with anger, bitterness, or a desire for revenge. However, as Christians, we are called to respond differently. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught his followers to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” This is a radical and

challenging command, but it is one that is central to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Responding to persecution with love and forgiveness does not mean that we ignore or condone the actions of our persecutors. It does not mean that we do not seek justice or take steps to protect ourselves and others from harm. Rather, responding with love and forgiveness means that we choose to respond to persecution in a way that reflects the love and grace of Christ.

One way that we can respond to persecution with love and forgiveness is by praying for our persecutors. This can be a difficult and humbling act, but it is a powerful way to demonstrate the love of Christ. By praying for those who persecute us, we can release our anger and bitterness and instead ask God to work in their hearts and bring about transformation and healing.

We should appeal to God in prayer for His help in our various ministries. When Peter and John had been threatened by the Jewish council for preaching Jesus, they gathered with other Christians and prayed to God. They never chicken out but rather asked for strength from God to preach despite the threats. As a result, they preached the word with boldness (**Acts 4:23-31**).

The devil is a roaring lion causing suffering to Christians. We must have faith to steadfastly resist him. In this context God urges us to cast our cares

on Him for He cares for us. (**1 Peter 5:7-9**). Those who trust God will turn to Him in time of persecution. He can give strength and boldness as He did for His servants throughout the Bible. (**Acts 12:5,12; 16:24,25; Ephesians 5:18; James 5:13**).

When facing persecution, it's easy to feel overwhelmed and discouraged. It can be tempting to lash out in anger or retreat into isolation. However, turning to prayer can provide a sense of peace and clarity in the midst of turmoil. By lifting our concerns and fears to God, we can find solace in knowing that we are not alone in our struggles.

Prayer is a powerful tool that can help us navigate through difficult times. It allows us to communicate with God and seek His guidance and protection. Through prayer, we can find the strength to endure persecution with grace and humility. It reminds us that God is in control and that He is always watching over us, even in the darkest of times.

USE THE SCRIPTURES

Opposition is much harder to take when we can't prove we are right. But if we understand and trust God's word, we are much stronger; this calls for more earnest study of the Bible.

"But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened. 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". (1 Peter 3:14-16 – NIV).

When we suffer for righteousness, we need not fear their threats. They may defame us and speak against our good conduct in Christ. But if we are always ready to give answer for our hope, then they may be ashamed. If we can defend our beliefs by the Bible, then it becomes clear that opponents are not really opposing us, but they are opposing God's word!

- Note that this should be done with meekness and fear. We should not act with self-righteous pride, simply trying to win an argument to prove we are right and put them down.
- We must love their souls, while hating their sinful deeds, so we sincerely try to persuade them to serve the Lord.
- **Matthew 4:1-11**– When Satan opposed Jesus, Jesus always appealed to God's word: *"It is written."* As a result, He did not sin, and eventually the Devil had to leave.
- The easiest targets for persecutors are people who have not been studying their Bibles, so they cannot give solid evidence for their position. When a person cannot prove his position he faces uncertainty and is much more likely to surrender his position.

CHOOSE YOUR CLOSE COMPANIONS CAREFULLY

- Some Christians submit themselves unnecessarily to ridicule and temptation from people with whom they simply should not be closely associating.
- Others do not associate as closely as they should with Christians who can encourage them as they face persecution.
- We Should Limit Our Companionship with Persistent Sinners. – **1 Corinthians 15:33** says, – Evil company corrupts good habits. **Proverbs 13:20** – He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.
- Like Jesus, we may use our association with sinners to try to convert them. But if they resist our efforts to teach, ridicule our service to God, and try to persuade us to do wrong, then they become part of the persecution we are trying to avoid! (**Proverbs 5:8; 22:24,25; Genesis 39:10**). We Should Develop Close Companionship with Faithful Christians.
- Christians can handle persecution by relying on their faith, seeking support from their community of Believers, and responding with love and forgiveness.
- Being part of a community of like-minded individuals can provide strength and encouragement during difficult times. When facing persecution, it's important to remember that you are not

alone. Surrounding yourself with people who share your beliefs can help you feel supported and understood.

Whereas worldly people may ridicule and tempt us, Christians should help strengthen us. When Peter and John were persecuted, they went to their own companions (Christians) and prayed together. (**Acts 4:23**). Christians comfort one another in suffering. When others have faced the same problems we face, they can sympathize and give helpful advice. Unlike the world, faithful Christians want us to do the right thing and will help us, not hinder us. (**2 Corinthians 1:3-5**).

Hebrew Christians, facing opposition and persecution, were commanded not to forsake their assembling together. They needed to exhort and stir one another up to good works, so their hope would not waver. When people of the world ridicule our stand for the truth and tempt us to sin, we need to back off from such relationships and strengthen our association with Christians. (**Hebrews 10:23-25**).

REMEMBER FAITHFUL SERVANTS WHO ENDURED PERSECUTION

"Brothers and sisters, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (James 5:10). Many servants of God were persecuted but endured faithfully. Their example warns us to expect persecution but also shows that we can endure persecution successfully. (**Matthew 5:10-12**).

Consider some examples:

- Moses facing Pharaoh
- Elijah facing King Ahab and 450 prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18)
- Daniel thrown into the lion's den for praying to God despite the law against it. (**Daniel 6**).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, when told by King Nebuchadnezzar to worship his golden image or be thrown into a fiery furnace, responded: *"...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up."* (**Daniel 3:17,18**)

- ❖ When the apostles were commanded by the Sanhedrin not to preach about Jesus, Peter said: *"We ought to obey God rather than men" "... and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So, they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."* {**Acts 5:29,40-42**}.
- ❖ On trial before the council, Stephen asked which of the prophets were not persecuted by the Jews. In the same way they had killed Jesus. They responded by

killing Stephen. Yet he died faithfully, calling on God to forgive them and to receive his spirit. {**Acts 7:52,54-60**}

- ❖ The apostle Paul was persecuted nearly everywhere and often had to flee to save his life. Yet he continued to preach and did not compromise truth. {**Acts 20:18-20,23,24**}
- ❖ The early church's endurance under Roman persecution is legendary. They met in secret, encouraged one another, and boldly witnessed despite threats of imprisonment or death.
- Polycarp, a Second Century Martyr: When urged to renounce Christ, Polycarp famously said, *"Eighty-six years I have served Him, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"* His steadfastness led to his martyrdom, inspiring generations.

The CEV Bible reflects this spirit: *"We can be brave because God gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* — **1 Corinthians 15:57** (CEV).

- God's faithful servants have suffered every imaginable persecution. They become a great cloud of witnesses urging us to run with patience the race before us.
- Jesus, who endured the cross and the opposition of enemies, especially becomes our example

lest we become weary and discouraged. {**Hebrews 11:35-40, 12:1-4**}

- When we are suffering, it is easy to think no one else ever had problems like we have. But when we know that other servants of God faced problems just as bad and often worse than we face but they endured faithfully, their example encourages us to stand firm. (**2 Corinthians 11:23-27; 1 Peter 5:8,9; 2:21-23; Acts 8:1-4**).

REMEMBER YOUR ETERNAL REWARD

Overcoming opposition requires strong motivation. One motivation that helps us serve God despite persecution is our love for God. Another is our eternal reward.

When men hate us, exclude us, and revile us, we can rejoice because we have a great reward in heaven. Persecution is never pleasant, but we can have a sense of joy through it because of the reward to which it leads. {**Luke 6:22,23**}.

“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you

endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.” {**Hebrews 10:32-36** -NIV}.

The Hebrew Christians could joyfully endure tribulations and the plundering of their goods because they knew they had a better possession in heaven. The Christians at Smyrna were facing tribulation and about to be cast into prison. Jesus promised that, if they were faithful until death, He would give them a crown of life. {**Revelation 2:10**}. One reason Christians fall away when they are persecuted is that they forget the eternal reward. Instead of focusing on the immediate problem, we need to concentrate on the end result. No matter how much we suffer for the Lord, it will be worth it!

CONCLUSION

Suffering is never pleasant. That is why people do it to us. They are hoping we will become discouraged and forsake our stand, or at least some will turn away from us and refuse to join us. If we give up or compromise the truth, then we have allowed them to succeed! Satan has won and we have lost. While on earth, Jesus suffered more persecution than any of us ever will. He knows firsthand the problems involved. He has provided us the means to overcome and be faithful. It is not easy, but it is possible. But we must make use of the means He has provided.

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you". {Matthew 5:11-12 – NIV}

This passage reminds us that persecution is not a sign of weakness, but rather a badge of honour for those who stand firm in their faith. It encourages us to rejoice in the face of persecution, knowing that our reward in heaven will be great. By meditating on these words and allowing them to sink into our hearts, we can find the courage and strength to face whatever challenges come our way.