

Persecuted for Righteousness Sake(8)

From our earliest memories, chastening and negative responses were used to force us to change our behavior, make us feel we were wrong and lead us to change our attitude toward that type of behavior.

Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of correction will drive it far from him. Pr. 22:15

Do not withhold correction from a child, For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. 14 You shall beat him with a rod, And deliver his soul from hell. Pr. 23:13-14

The rod and rebuke give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother. Pr. 29:13

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? 8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. 9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. 11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Heb 12:7-11

Parents, teachers, coaches, preachers and elders all use negative responses to change our behavior and lead us to repent. A negative response and punishment for an action was designed by God to reveal we had done something wrong and needed to change. Nothing really changes after we become adults. The respect we gave our parents and teachers is now given to civil government and our Employer. God has commanded that we protect this attitude of submission. We are commanded to obey our parents(Eph 6:1-3) the government(Rom 13:1-5), and our employer(I Pet 2:18-21).

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. 4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. 5 Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake. Rom. 13:1-6

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 1 Peter 2:18-21

When properly trained and disciplined, we use the responses of others as a guide to the quality of our conduct. We enjoy acceptance and fear disapproval. We learned that opposition toward our beliefs or conduct makes us an evildoer.

Jesus Turns Things Upside Down in the Final Beatitude

In this beatitude, Jesus refined and narrowed these things. He revealed to His disciples, that in their walk with Him times would arise when none of the above would be true. Standing with Jesus can bring the same disapproval and punishment from parents, teachers, civil government and employers that we saw as sinful and evil in our early youth. The final beatitude and its parallel passage in Luke reveal and bring to the light that under certain circumstances, this disapproval will be admirable in the sight of God. Yet it is a very narrow path and must be carefully entered into. Jesus is explicit. Only persecution "for righteousness sake," "for My sake" and "for the Son of Man's sake" is blessed.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Mt 5:10-12

Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets. ... 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, For so did their fathers to the false prophets. Lk 6:22-23, 26

When a close relationship with Jesus and an unwavering conviction to hold fast to the moral and doctrinal truths He revealed leads to disapproval, punishment or a desire to destroy, then we have to carefully evaluate it's true meaning. Everyone with a tender conscience and a desire to do what is right in the sight of God and man is deeply moved when their efforts bring a negative outcome. In such moments our first thought is to question ourselves. Did I cause this? Was I too harsh, too dogmatic, not merciful or meek enough? Do I need to reevaluate my actions and make some changes? Although it is always possible that this is true, we have to broaden our thinking. It is just as possible that our love and allegiance to Jesus

created the anger and disapproval in others. If this be the case we must endure the persecution for righteousness sake and bear up under their disapproval.

So we find ourselves hemmed in with two great mandates and two powerful truths. We are commanded in the Scriptures to suspect and doubt ourselves when we face disapproval from those in authority. We are also commanded to humbly and zealously stand for the truth and if we are persecuted and “*suffer as a Christian,*” it is honorable and worthy of praise. So we walk the narrow path between suffering as an evil doer and suffering as a Christian. It is foolish to assume either without careful examination.

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.
1Pet. 4:12-16

The Spirit gives us clear parameters regarding all negative responses. First, we must not think it odd, strange or unusual that we will have fiery trials, and we must not allow them to create despondency or fear. Second, be certain we are truly being reproached “*for the name of Christ.*” Third, never simply assume, be certain that in spite of your best efforts you are also being reproached as an evildoer or meddler in other men's matters. Finally if you can clearly see you are truly suffering because you did everything Jesus said to do and there is no problem on your part, then, don't be ashamed, but glorify God.

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. Acts 5:41

A Conflict Illustrated by Light and Darkness in the World

This conflict did not begin with us. There is a large group of people who actively hate the light of truth that Jesus brought into the world.

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” Jn 3:19-21

The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Jn. 7:7-8

Jesus did everything perfectly while here. He was meek, lowly and humble. He used love and persuasion. He never failed to present the truth in the best possible way to every person He had to deal with. Yet He was persecuted and hated and it was never His fault! Jesus later explained to His apostles that this was not going to change. That if they persecuted him after doing everything right they would also persecute all who followed Him and taught as He did.

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. Jn 15:18-21

Jesus spoke out more fully on this matter as He addressed the issue of a true disciple. Our love and devotion for Him must transcend all of the things discussed above. Not even the closest human tie can keep this from happening. All of them must be sacrificed if we are ever placed into such a position.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; 36 and ‘a man's enemies will be those of his own household.’ 37 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. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it. Mt 10:32-39

Once we understand this point, things become much clearer. Jesus expects the loyalty of His disciples to transcend all other loyalties. When we are forced into a position where our loyalty to Jesus must be sacrificed to keep peace in the home then we must be prepared to sacrifice peace in the home. If this means we must lose our lives, our jobs, our liberties, our reputation, then we have no other choice.

If we choose them over us, He will reject us. If we choose Jesus over them then they will persecute us. This is often subtle, a spouse or parent plans a dinner at the same time the church meets to worship. At that moment, we have a command not to forsake the assembly and a family member who will become angry. . What does Jesus demand? That we choose His authority and commands over the desires of others.

Marvel not, brethren, if the world hates you. I Jn 3:13

Paul Used his own Life to further Illustrate and Explain

Paul praised Timothy for how closely he had followed Paul's example, not just the important qualities of "doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, but equally important Paul's "persecutions, and afflictions."

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra — what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. 12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 2Tim 3:10-12

Paul was not alone and neither was Timothy. All godly Christians are going to suffer persecution! It is unavoidable and inevitable that as we let our light shine in the darkness, sooner or later that light will shine on one who hates the light. When we meet such a person, and we remain godly, we will suffer persecution. God wanted us to know what the inspired apostles were forced to endure. They too did everything right and exactly as the inspiration of the Holy Spirit led them. They gave no thought and the words were given to them. No one could fault them for what they said or how they said it.

But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. 12 Now brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 13 And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Mk 13:11-13

For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now. 1Cor 4:9-13

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed — 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 2 Cor 4:7-11

Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor 12:9-10

There is no stigma in being persecuted as Paul and Jesus were. There is no reason to feel we have done something wrong or need to change our convictions or lower our zeal. While the inspired apostles lived, they could reveal directly to the people that what they were doing was right. What of today? Who can tell us if we are being persecuted for righteousness, or because we are a meddler, evildoer, or can't control our tongue. No one can deny our own zeal can lead us to become a meddlers. Sometimes our approach in preaching the gospel is not in love. Sometimes civil government passes laws that are contrary to those of Jesus Christ. It is one thing to preach against such laws and quite another to violate them, or fight fire with fire by violating other laws. Those who claim to follow Jesus and yet kill abortion doctors or bomb abortion clinics would be suffering as evil doers, not being persecuted for righteousness sake. When such a man quotes Peter and the other apostles to justify such conduct, we know it is wrong because he is not obeying God when he murders or destroys property.

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29-30

Although this is always true, it is also true that it is possible to be an evil doer breaking God's law, all the while seeking to justify ourselves with "We must obey God rather than men. This is why Jesus qualified the type and reason for the persecution.

For Righteousness' Sake

Those who are mistreated and punished for anything other than "righteousness sake," or when a name is cast out as evil, but it is not "falsely," we will not be congratulated or happy. If we are being mistreated because we are an evildoer, rude, unloving, or impatient then such mistreatment is designed to lead us to repentance. How do we tell the difference? How do we know when we are being persecuted for the right reasons? It is simple. When we can isolate the mistreatment to one cause: our refusal to compromise on the truth. To accomplish this, we must honestly evaluate all our motives and attitudes. We can't use our uncompromising stand for Jesus as a cover or excuse for being rude, mean, or a fanatic. Paul made it clear

that all the mistreatment endured by the apostles was undeserved: “being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat.” (1 Cor 4:12-13) They always spoke “the truth in love” there was no other reason for their mistreatment than their loyalty and love for Christ. After all the blessings they offered, and the entreaties they made, they were still persecuted.

All godly Christians are going to suffer persecution. It is the true sign of living Christianity at its proper level (godliness). Yet we are also commanded to be as loving, patient, enduring and compromising as possible.

If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Rom 12:18

Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. 6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one. Col 4:5-6

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. Col 3:12-14

When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. Matt 10:23

Only after all these efforts have been pursued, and persecution still comes will we know it is exclusively for righteousness sake. No matter how kind, compassionate and holy we are, there will be those who will revile and cast out our name as evil. Our stand for the truth will bring it on. But we still want to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves (Mt 10:16-23). We must still be a peacemaker, but when the line finally must be crossed where the authority of Jesus is on one side and their approval is on the other, we will have to choose loyalty to Jesus. At such a moment no matter how kind, loving, understanding, patient and nicely we say it, if we let your light shine and salt, savor we will be persecuted. When the price of peace is sin, it costs too much!

I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war. Ps 120:7

Questions

- 1 How is this beatitude different from the others?
- 2 From the time of our youth, what have we been taught about rebukes and reproaches from others?
- 3 If a parent, teacher, coach or police officer rebukes us what do we normally conclude?
- 4 What did God command His people to do when they are treated as evildoers?
- 5 What does Jesus say happens to disapproval, rebukes and chastening when it is for righteousness sake?
- 6 How will men in darkness often respond when the light reveals their evil?
- 7 If the world hated Jesus and what He stood for, how will the world feel about us?
- 8 Is there a way to avoid those who hated Jesus hating us? What is it?
- 9 Did Jesus come to bring peace or a sword?
- 10 Why would we ever be in a position to love our mother or father more than Jesus?
- 11 If we love Jesus more than our mother or father how will we treat His commands?
- 12 Are there any exceptions or reasons why we should disobey Jesus to please a loved one?
- 13 If we please a loved one and reject Jesus on any subject or command how does Jesus feel about us?
- 14 Will all godly Christians suffer persecution? Why
- 15 Whenever we are being mistreated how do we know for certain it is persecution and not a just punishment?
- 16 If we are being mistreated for being rude, unloving, impatient or cruel is it persecution?
- 17 If we are mistreated for being loving, compassionate and kind but unbending on Jesus law is this persecution?
- 20 If we can keep peace and avoid persecution without violating the law of Christ, should we always strive for peace?
- 21 If we are a peacemaker, why would we ever suffer persecution?