



PERSECUTION

# A Biblical Perspective

Randall J. Hillebrand

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# COPYRIGHT PAGE

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Cover and DCE logo designed by Oksana Likhonos, DDD-Studio Design

Tel.: +380 44 451 5251

E-mail: [info@ddd.com.ua](mailto:info@ddd.com.ua)

Web site: [www.ddd.com.ua](http://www.ddd.com.ua)

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This book is dedicated to my Christian brothers and sisters to whom  
“it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him,  
but also to suffer for His sake” (Php. 1:29).  
You have my respect and prayers!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

➤ Copyright page.....	i
➤ Dedication page.....	ii
➤ Table of Contents.....	iii
➤ Preface.....	iv
➤ <b>The Last Days</b> .....	1
➤ <b>Understanding Matthew 10:16-39</b> .....	3
❖ Passage and Context.....	3
❖ Guidelines for Persecution.....	4
➤ <b>Chronicle of Matthew 10:16-39</b> .....	12
➤ <b>Applying Matthew 10:16-39</b> .....	15
➤ <b>The Necessity of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer</b> .....	19
❖ Word of God.....	19
❖ Mediation.....	20
❖ Prayer.....	23
➤ <b>Encouragement When Facing Persecution</b> .....	27
❖ Encouraging Truths!.....	27
▪ <i>Jesus has Overcome the World</i> .....	27
▪ <i>Persecution is a Tool of God</i> .....	28
▪ <i>Nothing can Remove You from the Love of Christ</i> .....	31
❖ Encouraging Help!.....	32
▪ <i>The Trinity</i> .....	32
▪ <i>Wisdom</i> .....	34
▪ <i>Grace</i> .....	36
▪ <i>Prayers of the Saints</i> .....	41
❖ Encouraging Final Remarks!.....	42

## APPENDIX:

Contextual Discussion of Matthew 10:16-39.....	45
Observations about Persecution from the Book of Acts.....	48
Persecution and the Church.....	50
About the Author.....	72



# PREFACE

The purpose of this book is to assist and encourage fellow Christians in nations where they are being persecuted for the sake of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. According to the 2013 World Watch List, the top 50 countries experiencing persecution are listed below in order of severity. They are:

- |                 |                          |                             |
|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. North Korea  | 18. Laos                 | 35. Bahrain                 |
| 2. Saudi Arabia | 19. Turkmenistan         | 36. Palestinian Territories |
| 3. Afghanistan  | 20. Qatar                | 37. China                   |
| 4. Iraq         | 21. Vietnam              | 38. Azerbaijan              |
| 5. Somalia      | 22. Oman                 | 39. Morocco                 |
| 6. Maldives     | 23. Mauritania           | 40. Kenya                   |
| 7. Mali         | 24. Tanzania             | 41. Comoros                 |
| 8. Iran         | 25. Egypt                | 42. Malaysia                |
| 9. Yemen        | 26. United Arab Emirates | 43. Djibouti                |
| 10. Eritrea     | 27. Brunei               | 44. Tajikistan              |
| 11. Syria       | 28. Bhutan               | 45. Indonesia               |
| 12. Sudan       | 29. Algeria              | 46. Colombia                |
| 13. Nigeria     | 30. Tunisia              | 47. Uganda                  |
| 14. Pakistan    | 31. India                | 48. Kazakhstan              |
| 15. Ethiopia    | 32. Myanmar (Burma)      | 49. Kyrgyzstan              |
| 16. Uzbekistan  | 33. Kuwait               | 50. Niger                   |
| 17. Libya       | 34. Jordan               |                             |

(<http://www.worldwatchlist.us/world-watch-list-countries/>)

It is my opinion and understanding of the Bible that the closer the world gets to the last days leading up to the rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ, the greater will be the rejection of God, His Word and His righteousness. As this occurs, I also believe that the list of countries where persecution takes place will grow; and it will grow quickly. The world will not permit anyone to stand in their way of doing evil.

“Father, please bless Your children who live daily with ill-treatment for the sake of Christ. Please give them Your grace, Your peace and let them experience

Your love and presence. Father, please meet their daily needs and give them the strength and boldness to be Your witnesses who walk worthy of their calling. Also grant them the grace necessary to be faithful, even unto death if need be. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!"



Randy and his wife Annette have lived in Ukraine since 2001 and are available to lead training seminars for groups of pastors, elders, evangelists and their wives. Randy, as a former pastor, can provide training throughout the countries of Eurasia on how to build a dynamic church and on how to mobilize your church to do evangelism. As a former pastor's wife, Annette can teach women on pertinent topics of importance to them. Randy is also available online for those who would like to write him about issues pertaining to their churches.

Address:

Randy Hillebrand

PO Box 52

Kiev, Ukraine 02175

Phone: +380 67 235 93 10

E-mail: [randy.hillebrand@crossworld.org](mailto:randy.hillebrand@crossworld.org)

# The Last Days

*“From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day. Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s.’ Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds.’”*  
(Matthew 16:21–27)

Throughout the expanse of Christianity believers have faced persecution to various degrees. As the passage above shows, our Savior suffered, so we too must be willing to do the same. Particularly, while we are living in “these last days” (Heb. 1:2) and approaching the end of this time period, we are seeing the certainty of the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy realized.

While writing to Timothy about this period, Paul instructed him, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these” (2 Tim. 3:1–5). All one has to do is look at the world today to see that evil is gaining momentum and strength. Consequently these words of Paul are becoming more and more evident. As this occurs, it goes without saying that the Church will be the recipient of much of the world’s expressed hatred for God and His



righteousness. As Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:18–19). So as the world continues to reject and move farther away from God and His moral standards, embracing to a far greater degree Satan’s objectives and the immoral, carnal desires of mankind, persecution of Christians will increase. As this occurs, living righteously, standing for truth and sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ will become more difficult, resulting in various degrees of persecution and even death as is already the case in some countries today.

How then is the Christian to respond to this onslaught against his faith, himself, and even his loved ones? In this book I desire to lay a scriptural foundation of how to respond to persecution in answer to this question. Matthew 10 will be the main passage focused on.

# *Understanding Matthew 10:16-39*

## Passage and Context

Matthew 10:16–39

- 16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.
- 17 “But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues;
- 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles.
- 19 “But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.
- 20 “For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.
- 21 “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.
- 22 “You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.
- 23 “But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.
- 24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.
- 25 “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!
- 26 “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.
- 27 “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.
- 28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

- 29 "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.
- 30 "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
- 31 "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows.
- 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.
- 33 "But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.
- 34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
- 35 "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
- 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his 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 has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

The immediate context of Matthew 10:16-39 is Jesus giving His twelve disciples a specific task. He sent them out to preach the message of the kingdom of God to the Jews in Israel (vss. 1-15). Before their departure Jesus spoke to them about what they would face in the future, after His ascension and the establishment of the Church. However the truth and application of this passage were not meant for just the twelve disciples but for all believers today and on into the coming tribulation period. (For a more detailed contextual discussion, please see the Appendix.)

## Guidelines for Persecution

In this passage Jesus gave His twelve disciples a very honest and blatant understanding of what the future would hold for them if they were to continue to follow Him. The picture Jesus painted included the reality of persecution. To prepare them for what lay ahead, Jesus spoke about two main issues: 1) what it means to be a follower of Jesus; and 2) how to act as a follower of Jesus. The following

guidelines are discussions of each point Jesus made with the purpose of helping you apply these truths to your life and personal situation. May this study be a blessing and encouragement to you.

## 1. Being sheep in the midst of wolves -- vs. 16a

As Jesus begins to address this issue of persecution, He tells the twelve in the introductory verse, "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves."

The first thing which is obvious is that the twelve were purposely being sent out into a dangerous place. The picture is that of Christ's gentle, helpless lambs being surrounded by vicious, savage wolves (those who would oppose them and want them killed, such as the Chief priests, members of the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians, Scribes, and Gentiles, all of whom opposed Jesus). Knowing this reality, Jesus desired to prepare them.

## 2. Being shrewd and innocent in your behavior -- vs. 16b-c

In Jesus' preparation of them, His first concern was their behavior. When they would face the onslaught of wolves, He wanted them to be shrewd and innocent in their behavior.

Beginning with the easier of the two phrases, Jesus wanted them to be "innocent as doves" or guiltless before their enemies. The word "innocent" communicates this as it literally means, "unmixed; pure." Thus the servant of God in his life, his ministry, and when facing persecution is to be characterized as a harmless dove. An example of such a life was that of Stephen.

It is recorded in the book of Acts, "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8). This book also reveals that he was a man full of wisdom and Holy Spirit directed (6:10). Because of the kind of person he was and because those who opposed him were not capable of coping with his wisdom and the Holy Spirit who was working in and

through him, they plotted against him. Not being able to find any grounds upon which to accuse him, his adversaries tried to discredit Stephen by means of his faith, misrepresenting the words of Jesus to make an allegation for his arrest (Acts 6:14). Consequently Stephen ended up before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7), a pack of vicious, savage wolves, who would be responsible for his death. Yet it is written of this man of God when standing before them, "And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel" (6:15). Stephen, who was innocent as a dove in his behavior, could only be arrested and tried as the result of the scheming and lies of unscrupulous men (6:11-14). In other words his life was so pure and unmixed with the things of the world that they could find nothing against him upon which to charge him.

Stephen's situation parallels that of another man, the prophet Daniel.

"Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom. Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or *evidence of* corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was *to be* found in him. Then these men said, 'We will not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find *it* against him with regard to the law of his God.'" (Dan. 6:3-4)

Daniel like Stephen was a man of character, a man who was above reproach in his behavior. No grounds upon which to accuse him could be found in his character, so this assurers turned to his faith. Daniel as well as Stephen demonstrated the kind of behavior that Jesus desired in His disciples, being men who were innocent as doves. It is however interesting to note that Daniel was spared death due to God's protection after being thrown into the lions' den, whereas Stephen was martyred for his faith. God has His own agenda for His servants, an agenda which His servants must be willing to accept.

Jesus also stated that His disciples were to “be shrewd as serpents” in their behavior. For many Christians, correlating this phrase together with “innocent as doves” in describing Christian behavior is difficult. Yet it is clear from the context of verse 16 that both phrases are connected and both are referring to the same issue, the behavior of Jesus’ sheep in the midst of wolves.

To be “shrewd” is to behave wisely and cunningly, both characteristics of a serpent. The man of God is to behave in this manner as well; and in context, particularly when surrounded by wolves in difficult, evil times. To better understand this concept, other passages will now be referenced which teach and clarify this truth, tying together “shrewd” or wise behavior in the midst of evil times. Please note that emphasis has been added to each passage to more clearly illustrate the point being made.

The first passage is Romans 16:19, which could possibly contain a paraphrase of the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:16. It says:

“For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is evil.”

In this verse both characteristics are present, being “shrewd” (“wise”) and innocent. In both cases they are referring to godly behavior. The next passage is Ephesians 5:15–17.

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Again the idea of being “shrewd” (“wise”) and not “unwise” “because the days are evil” is present. So the Ephesians were not to be foolish, but were to understand how Jesus wanted them to live (“understand what the will of the Lord is”). This is just how He wanted the Twelve to behave as seen in Matthew 10:16. Lastly, Philippians 2:14–16 says:

“Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”

The Philippians were also told to be “blameless and innocent,” “above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” They were to “appear as lights,” “holding fast” to the Word of God. Once again, this too is the behavior Jesus wanted the Twelve to manifest in the midst of wolves, being shining lights in a dark, evil world (cf. Mat. 5:14-16).

Shrewdness in this context then is a positive attribute when doing good. Therefore knowing how to behave properly during persecution may require being shrewd, especially when dealing with the devil who is shrewd in doing evil. He is a wise and cunning creature who knows man better than man knows himself. He has an advantage over us. This is why believers must be shrewd and innocent in how they respond to him and his evil schemes and temptations.

Practically, this is an important issue for a believer who may be tempted to find a way to remove himself from being under persecution. In other words, when the servant of God is surrounded by wolves who want to hurt and devour him, he may be tempted to succumb to things such as dishonesty, manipulation, lying, bribery, being an informant, or anything else which might help his situation or that of his loved ones. Understanding this temptation, he is instead to be wise and innocent in his behavior, never doing or saying anything which could be harmful to others, to their testimony or to his own testimony. He is always to do that which is right and pleasing in the sight of God. Living this way will convict the evildoers who slander him and bring glory to God. Peter makes this clear in his first epistle:

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Pet. 2:12)



Continuing, Peter gives his readers an exhortation about how they are to behave before the authorities:

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”  
(1 Pet. 2:13–15)

When in the midst of wolves, where fear attempts to engulf the believer, he is to respond by doing good, being innocent and shrewd, so as to silence the ignorance of the foolish. Responding in such a way could have other results such as the salvation of his persecutors, and as Proverbs 16:7 states, “When a man’s ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Therefore when captured and turned over to the authorities, he has the power to behave in this manner due to the empowerment of the Holy Spirit who lives within him.

### 3. Being a testimony before those who desire to harm you -- vss. 17-20

As Jesus continues in Matthew 10:17-20, He warns His disciples, “beware of men.” When carrying out ministry during a time of persecution, one needs to keep in mind that doing his or her work may have consequences as in the case of Stephen. This is what Jesus addresses in these verses.

Like the Twelve, there will be those times when Christians will be captured and taken before the authorities, possibly being scourged (vs. 17); they may even be taken before governors and kings, for the sake of Jesus. Yet Jesus wanted them to know that when this happens they will be a testimony before those presiding and before other unbelievers as well (vs. 18). Thus they need not be concerned about such circumstances or even about what to say. The Holy Spirit would give them the very words to speak and how to say them when the time would arrive as He would assist them (vss. 19-20). Of course this also means that

the Holy Spirit is with them; they are not alone. So no matter what they might face, they could know that the Spirit of God would be right there with them. This should be comforting and a reason to rest and trust in God in the midst of persecution.

#### 4. Being hated because of Jesus -- vss. 21-23

Continuing in Matthew 10:21-23, Jesus tells the twelve how much they will be hated on His behalf, hated even to the point that they would be betrayed by their own family members, even unto death. Yet the one who endures through all of this until the end, the one who is faithful, will be saved (vss. 21-22).

Jesus finishes this section by stating that when they find themselves being persecuted in one place, they should flee to another. By doing this they would be achieving His purpose for them, that of preaching the gospel in many places. Nevertheless, Jesus said that they will never reach all the cities of Israel with the gospel before His return (vs. 23).

#### 5. Being a disciple of Christ -- vss. 24-39

As Jesus closes this section of Matthew 10, He does so by speaking about what it means to be His disciple. He makes it clear that being a true disciple has a price. This portion has been outlined for simplicity and emphasis. Jesus said:

- Expect persecution! -- vss. 24-25

↓ Why?

⇒ Because Jesus was persecuted, His disciples should expect this mistreatment as well.

- **BUT**, they do not need to fear! -- vss. 26-31

↓ Why?

⇒ Because one day all people will be judged, so those who persecute believers will have to answer for their deeds.

⇒ Because those who want to harm believers can only kill their bodies; they cannot destroy their souls.

- ⇒ Because God's children are very valuable to Him; He watches over them and knows every circumstance of their lives in each and every situation.
- ❖ Therefore believers who confess Christ before men, taking a stand for Him in the midst of persecution, He will confess them before His Father who is in heaven -- vss. 32-33.

Being a true follower of Jesus also means that as His followers they are to:

- Love Jesus more than all others! -- vss. 34-38
  - ⇓ Why?
    - ⇒ Because those who love others (parents, children, etc.) more than Jesus are not worthy (deserving) of Him.
    - ⇒ Because those who are not willing to take up their cross and follow Jesus in His sufferings and death are not worthy of Him.
  - ❖ Therefore if the twelve were willing to give their lives for the sake of Christ, they would find eternal life -- vs. 39.

(Note: Eleven of the twelve were willing to do this, however Judas Iscariot was not.)

# Chronicle of Matthew 10:16-39

The application of this passage is not complicated. For simplicity it has been chronicled with short summaries.

When facing persecution, Christians need to understand and do the following:

1. **They are in the midst of wolves** (vs. 16a)

There are many in the world who are strongly opposed to Christ and therefore opposed to His followers. They want to harm them. Actually at times believers may be in the midst of wolves without even knowing it, so they need to be careful ("Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are vicious wolves" (Mat. 7:15)).

2. **Be shrewd and innocent in their behavior** (vs. 16b-c)

The believers' goal is to glorify Christ in godly, pure and wise behavior before the wolves and the world. Therefore they must be careful to do nothing which could harm others and/or bring shame upon their faith or character or that of others.

3. **Beware of men** (vs. 17)

There are people in the world who desire to harm believers so they must be careful when in their midst.

4. **They may be brought before the authorities** (vs. 18)

Giving an account before the authorities is an opportunity to be a testimony before them and before other unbelievers for the sake of Christ.

5. **Do not worry when they are before authorities** (vss. 19-20)

If this occurs, believers should remember that the Holy Spirit is within them so they should not worry about what to say or how to say it. They are to trust God, for He is with them and will assist them.

**6. They are hated by the enemies of Jesus** (vss. 21-22)

Believers will be hated because they are disciples of Jesus. Even those from their own family may hate and rise up against them, possibly desiring their death. They are to be faithful and endure to the end, even in the face of death. Their perseverance will be proof of their salvation, and they will be saved.

**7. When being persecuted, flee** (vs. 23)

If believers have the opportunity to escape imminent persecution, they may flee. They are to keep in mind however that when faced with a situation where they have responsibility for others, or before the authorities or the courts, etc., they need to remain and be faithful. They are to always seek God for His wisdom. For further information on this issue, please read the section in the Appendix titled, "Observations about Persecution from the Book of Acts."

**8. Expect persecution** (vss. 24-25)

Since Jesus was persecuted, His followers should expect the same treatment.

**9. Do not fear** (vss. 26-31)

Believers are not to fear man who can only kill the body. Instead they are to fear God who can kill the body and destroy one's soul in hell. Those who persecute them will one day be judged because God's children are of great value to Him. He is watching over them and knows even the minutest details about their lives and what they are facing. They need to trust Him!

**10. Be faithful to Jesus** (vss. 32-33)

Believers who are faithful and confess Jesus before others will be rewarded when Jesus confesses them before His Heavenly Father. Yet those who deny Jesus will be denied by Him as well. Faithfulness is of utmost importance in a believer's relationship with God and Jesus.

**11. Love Jesus above all others** (vss. 34-39)

No matter what believers face in this world, including persecution, Jesus expects them to love Him above all else and above all others. Those who truly

love Him will be willing to take up their cross and give even their life for Him; and as a result, they will prove that they are truly His. As His, they are assured of eternal life. Those who do not love Him will desire their life (to live and not die) more than they desire to stand for Jesus, thus proving that they are not truly His disciple. As a result, their life on earth is all that they will have and eternal life will not be theirs.

# Applying Matthew 10:16-39

The Bible has a lot to say about the topic of persecution, both in the Old and New Testaments (See “Persecution and the Church” in the Appendix for further information.) Throughout the Bible believers were persecuted for speaking the truth, from Noah a preacher of righteousness, to the prophets, to the apostles and to other disciples of Jesus. This of course has continued to this day and will continue on into the future. Obviously, being one of God’s chosen has a price associated with it.

The price that some today have to pay includes ill-treatment such as being forced to pay large fines, being ostracized by family and friends, the loss of jobs, the loss of homes, and/or banishment from their community and/or from the country of their birth. It may include beatings or other forms of torture, even disfigurement from boiling water or from being thrown into a fire by family members. Being raped, arrested, imprisoned, or even put to death at the hands of those whom they love and who are suppose to love them can occur. Though none of these scenarios are pleasant to think about, and may be the cause of chronic fear, anxiety and sleepless nights; yet for many this is their reality.

When considering these truths, it may seem like a bleak future for Christians; yet these are the kinds of things that Jesus was warning His disciples about in Matthew 10:16-39. Being a follower of Jesus means living up to high expectations. This is seen in the fact that, knowing what lay ahead for many of His followers, Jesus sent them out to faithfully do His will. As He acknowledged, this would not be easy. A sheep is no match for a wolf; for when surrounded by wolves, sheep have no chance. Paul wrote to the Romans, “Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered’” (Romans 8:36). Jesus knew that many of His followers would be killed. He did not promise them a life free of these things. Instead He told them to expect persecution. For this reason He told them to take up their cross daily and follow Him. He told them to proclaim those things publicly which He told them privately. Jesus was expecting His followers to be as Daniel. When Daniel had learned that the decree was signed



which prohibited praying to any other deity for thirty days, being able to petition only the king, he continued to pray to God as he had done previously (Dan. 6:4-10). Daniel knew his fate, yet his trust was in God and not in man.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego did the same thing when they refused to bow down to the golden image which King Nebuchadnezzar had set up for worship. They were willing to be cast alive into the midst of a blazing furnace rather than worship a false god. It was then, when facing this reality, that “Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up’” (Dan. 3:16-18). This faith, trust and associated boldness they and Daniel displayed is what Jesus expects of His followers.

The Apostle Paul was a man who faced many trials and tribulations as well; and though he suffered much, he too remained faithful. Paul summarized the things he endured for the sake of the gospel in 2 Corinthians 11:23-29 as follows:

- imprisonments
- beaten times without number
- often in danger of death
- five times he received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*
- three times he was beaten with rods
- once he was stoned
- three times he was shipwrecked
- a night and a day he spent in the deep
- on frequent journeys he was in danger:
  - from rivers
  - from robbers
  - from his countrymen
  - from the Gentiles

- when in the city
- when in the wilderness
- when on the sea
- when among false brethren
- *having been* in labor and hardship
- through many sleepless nights
- in hunger and thirst
- often without food
- in cold and exposure
- there was also his daily concern for:
  - all the churches
  - the weak and those led into sin

Paul's list of trials and heavy responsibilities show that he did not shrink back from his labor for Christ, even though at times he was afraid (Acts 18:9–10) and feared for his life (2 Cor. 1:8-9). He remained a faithful witness to the very end. Hebrews 10:38-39 states, "But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul."

The Apostles themselves faced much tribulation. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he spoke about the difficulties that he and the other Apostles faced:

"For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, *even* until now." (1 Cor. 4:9–13)

For the sake of the gospel they were poor, mistreated, without honor, hungry and thirsty, poorly clothed and homeless. As Paul asserted, they were “as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things.” The book of Acts points out that the Apostles were imprisoned (5:18; 12:3-4) and flogged (5:40); the Apostle James was martyred (12:2). According to church history all the Apostles were martyred with the exception of the Apostle John who was banished to the island of Patmos for a period of time (Rev. 1:9), later dying a natural death.

Thus the words which the Apostle Paul spoke when “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith” are true:

“Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)

In accord with this Paul also told Timothy:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim. 3:12)

It is through these things that God will perfect His children (Jam. 1:2-4; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 1 Pet. 5:10). Therefore persecution is to be expected for the Christian, just as Jesus told the Twelve before sending them out into the world. Though this may be a difficult truth to resign oneself to, please read on and be encouraged.

# The Necessity of the Word of God, Meditation and Prayer

When facing persecution, the Bible, meditation and prayer are vital. This is because it is through these means that God communicates, builds up, strengthens and sanctifies His children, giving them peace, comfort, direction and wisdom. Therefore it is necessary that all believers, especially those facing persecution, seek God daily through His word, meditate upon His Word and pray.

## Word of God

The Bible -- God's Word -- is the instrument which God has given His children to teach, train, correct, build up, equip (2 Tim. 3:16-17), strengthen and sanctify them. This is possible because the Word of God is living and active, able to judge their thoughts and intentions (Heb. 4:12). Therefore God can use it to transform them, resulting from its cleansing (Eph. 5:25-27) and sanctifying (John 17:17) capabilities. Consequently as believers read, study, memorize and then apply the Word of God to their lives, many essential things occur which are necessary for their spiritual growth and well-being, especially when facing difficult times such as persecution. This would include such things as:

- Growing in sanctification, holiness and godliness (John 17:17; Eph. 5:25-27; 2 Pet. 1:3)
- Growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:14-18)
- Growing in wisdom (Psa. 19:7; 119:99; Pro. 1:1-2; 2:1-7)
- Growing in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16)
- Growing in faith (1 Pet. 2:2)
- Growing in obedience to God (Josh. 1:8; Deut. 8:1,3,6)
- Growing in love for God (John 14:21-24; 1 John 5:3)
- Growing in stability (Mat. 7:24-25)
- Being edified (Acts 20:32)

- Renewing the mind and new self (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:1-3,10,16a; Php. 4:8; Titus 3:5)
- Abiding in the love of Christ (John 15:10)
- Giving hope (Rom. 15:4)
- Giving peace (Psa. 119:165; John 16:33)
- Giving joy (Psa. 119:111; Jer. 15:16)
- Giving spiritual well-being (Pro. 4:20,22)
- Giving counsel (Psa. 119:24)
- Giving direction in life (Psa. 119:105)
- Enabling victory over sin (Psa. 119:11)
- Enabling completeness in Christ (Col. 1:25,28)
- Enabling success in God's objectives (Josh. 1:8)
- Benefiting their welfare (Deut. 10:12-13)
- Producing fruit (Psa. 1:1-3)
- Protecting from evil (Eph. 6:13,18)
- Equipping for God's work (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Revealing their hearts (Heb. 4:12; Jam. 1:25)
- Receiving answered prayer (John 15:7)

Considering what the Word of God is capable of accomplishing and how it can mature and complete the follower of Jesus Christ, it is obvious how necessary it is in his life. This is why it is essential and why it must be a priority in the life of every believer. The integration of the Bible or the lack of it in a person's daily regimen will affect every aspect of his being and life. Consequently reading the Bible, studying and memorizing it, and then applying it will only bring benefit and help in one's daily rigors, especially in times of difficulty.

## Meditation

In union with the Word of God is the discipline of meditation. Meditation is when a follower of Jesus takes time to stop and ponder the Word of God. Meditation upon God Himself from what the Bible reveals is especially rewarding. Pondering who He is and what He has done can give a person hope, peace,

encouragement and even incite boldness. God's creation of everything out of nothing by merely speaking it into existence, His miracles in Egypt, His parting of the Red Sea, His descent upon Mt. Sinai in fire and smoke which made it quake, etc., are all things worthy of one's meditation. Considering His righteousness, holiness, eternity, omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence are encouraging attributes which can provide reassurance. Meditating as well on the work of God in one's personal life, including his salvation experience, his many answered prayers, God's interventions in his life, etc., are also inspiring to one's faith. Additionally, reflection upon Christ is beneficial and encouraging; upon His life, teachings, sacrifice and resurrection. Musing upon how He stilled the stormy sea, healed the sick, raised the dead, turned water into wine, multiplied the loaves and fish, as well how one day He will return to gather His precious Church at the rapture and bring His children home to be with Him forever is comforting and yields hope. Furthermore contemplating the Holy Spirit, His work and power should also be a matter of meditation since doing so will be a blessing for the one who makes the effort. Remembering how He indwells the believer and is his Comforter, Teacher, Counselor and Helper, the one who empowers him with His grace, leads him and helps him pray are valuable thoughts to contemplate and reassure the believer.

A verse which brings out the importance of meditation is found in Joshua 1:8 where God told Joshua, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." Meditation day and night upon God's Word will bring prosperity and success in the objectives in which God leads His children. This passage however is not teaching financial and material success nor prosperity unless it is the means to an end in fulfilling God's purpose for a specific believer. Success and prosperity will look different for each believer depending on God's plan for him. This is why believers should not compare their life with the lives of others. Yet, for God's success and prosperity to happen, one needs to meditate upon Him and His Word.

In Psalm 1 the psalmist spoke about the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked. He wrote, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night” (vs. 2). The righteous man then is not one who meditates upon or entertains evil thoughts; on the contrary, he meditates upon God’s Word continually. Doing so will produce a fear of God which according to Proverbs 9:10 is the beginning of wisdom (“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”)

In Psalm 4:4 King David tied together the concepts of not sinning and meditation. He wrote, “Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.” Meditating upon the greatness of our God should be a catalyst for growing in sanctification. God is holy and righteous, He is perfect and He is love, He has only our best interests in mind, having given His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins (cf. Rom. 8:32). Meditating upon these truths should help the believer regress from sin and progress toward holiness.

Meditation was such a part of David’s life that he penned in Psalm 63:6–7, “When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches, for You have been my help, and in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy.” As David’s help, it was his desire to ponder the God who cared so much for him that He intervened in his life and affairs. Therefore instead of sleeping, David pondered his God, His help, His works, His greatness, etc. As a result, rather than be afraid, David desired to worship God.

The subject of Psalm 119, the longest chapter in the Bible, is the Word of God. There the writer of this psalm mentions meditation many times:

- “I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways.” (vs. 15)
- “Even though princes sit *and* talk against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes.” (vs. 23)
- “Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders.” (vs. 27)



- “And I shall lift up my hands to Your commandments, which I love; And I will meditate on Your statutes.” (vs. 48)
- “May the arrogant be ashamed, for they subvert me with a lie; *But* I shall meditate on Your precepts.” (vs. 78)
- “O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” (vs. 97)
- “I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.” (vs. 99)
- “My eyes anticipate the night watches, that I may meditate on Your word.” (vs. 148)

From this psalm the portrayal of meditation upon God and His Word as an important aspect of the believer’s daily life and faith is made clear. When the psalmist was experiencing trials due to others (vss. 23 and 78), he meditated upon God’s Word.

Christians serve a great and powerful God who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, holy, just, loving, etc., etc., etc.! Thus thinking about Him and His Word will strengthen and encourage those who do so. It will remind them of the God they serve which will give them hope and encouragement in times of trials. For as they meditate, they will recall such things as: it is their God who is in control; He loves them greatly; He is on their side; nothing can separate them from His love, etc. King David said to God in Psalm 145:5, “On the glorious splendor of Your majesty and on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.”

## Prayer

Another important provision God has given believers is prayer. Prayer is the means through which followers of Jesus can communicate with their God, their Heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe. Prayer is that time when believers can: give thanks (Psa. 33:2; 1 Thes. 5:18; 2 Thes. 1:3; 2:13;), praise (Psa. 9:2; 34:1; Heb. 13:15), confess (Psa. 51), intercede (cf. Mat. 5:44; 2 Cor. 13:9; Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 1:3,9; Jam. 5:16;), cast their burdens (Psa. 62:8; Php. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 5:7; cf. Rom. 8:26-27), and make requests of their God (Psa. 5:2; 32:6; Php. 4:6; 1 Thes. 5:17; Jam. 5:13). Therefore believers can and are always to have an attitude of prayer (1

Thes. 5:17) and be devoted to it (Rom. 12:12). When a believer is engaged in prayer, it is then that God has a greater opportunity to speak to His child who should be at a heightened state of sensitivity to Him and His will while he is seeking and communicating with his God.

When facing persecution, prayer is a time when Christians can call out to God for wisdom, grace, peace, comfort, help, and anything else that is on their hearts. As King David stated in Psalm 62:8, "Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us." Therefore it is God's desire that His child run to Him as a refuge, trusting in Him for help and safety. Then as he comes before the throne of grace, he can with confidence draw near knowing that he will "receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Knowing this, he can pour out his heart before Him (everything that is in it, every last drop like water from a cup), finding peace in the process (Php. 4:6-7). This is the blessing of prayer -- being able to cast all of one's burdens upon his Heavenly Father, the One who cares for him (1 Pet. 5:7).

Prayer at any time is important and can be instrumental, but prayer combined with the Word of God and meditation is a powerful triad that can yield specific and significant benefits. This is true because uniting these three will give the believer a channel of concentrated and deliberate communication with God on specific topics. Therefore no matter what passage of Scripture is involved, after reading and pondering it, the one praying can respond to God through communicating his own personal thoughts, thanksgivings, questions and/or seek wisdom about the passage and/or the application thereof.

When facing trials such as persecution, using this triad can provide help while supplying comfort and peace. One use of this triad is in conjunction with the psalms. Because the psalmists oftentimes were looking for and crying out to God for help in the midst of trials, the one facing persecution will find numerous passages through which he can find solace. For example passages may:

- reflect directly on his own situation

- give wisdom into how to handle his situation
- show where he may need to change an aspect of his life
- show how God is able to meet his needs
- enable him to worship God in the midst of his trials
- simply just comfort and give hope, etc.

More specifically the psalms will give the believer a picture of the God of the Bible, His greatness, His abilities and His willingness to help. So as the reader meditates upon a psalm he is reading, he can then pray about it to seek help in his time of need. His response to God may reflect the following sentiments, "Father:

- I praise you!
- I love you!
- Thank you for this truth!
- Please make this truth a reality in my life.
- Please give me wisdom on how to apply this truth to my situation, to my life, etc.
- Please comfort me with this truth.
- Protect me! Save me! Give me your wisdom!
- Etc."

This concentrated time of prayer, which has a deliberate focus, can help direct the believer into an intimate and special time of communication with his God, resulting in peace, joy, comfort, worship, wisdom and receiving necessary help.

Please remember however that when praying, God only answers prayer in the affirmative when it is within His will (1 John 5:14-15). Therefore when meditating upon and praying Scripture back to God, it must be kept within its proper context. Caution needs to be exercised when asking God for something that was promised to Abraham, the nation of Israel, etc., as it may not be something promised to believers in the Church age (e.g., Deut. 28:1-14; these things God spoke to Israel about obedience to His law, not to the Church). However, if there is a principle in a verse which applies to believers living in the Church age, the believer should not hesitate

to pray it back to God (e.g., Josh. 1:9; though spoken to Joshua, Christians do not need to fear because God is with them).

One advantage of praying Scripture back to God is that when a believer requests the very thing God wants for him, He can be assured that God will answer it (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:15-16; asking God to live more holy). This method of praying can also bring great peace which is essential since persecution can be a catalyst for anxiety and fear. When praying through not only the psalms but many other passages where promises and/or principles are found to calm an anxious heart (Php.4:6-7, 1 Pet. 5:7; Deut. 31:8, Isa. 40; 41:10; Josh 1:9), God can give His children the peace which surpasses all comprehension, guarding their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Php. 4:6-7). Praying Scripture is therefore an important method of prayer to practice.

# Encouragement When Facing Persecution

Though the average Christian desires to avoid persecution, the Scriptures have many encouraging things to say to those who face it. May these truths be an encouragement to you.

## Encouraging Truths!

### *Jesus has Overcome the World*

Jesus told His disciples, “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Why do believers have tribulation? One reason is that believers have to struggle against Satan and his world system (John 12:31; Eph. 2:2; 6:12). Together they are a continual force which works against the believer, his life, family, ministry, spiritual health, etc. Another reason is a truth which Jesus expresses when praying to His Father: “I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14). Christians, like their Savior, are not of this world (John 8:23; 15:18). Their citizenship is in heaven (Php. 3:20). So because the world hates Jesus (John 15:18), loving the darkness of this world and not Jesus the Light (John 3:19-20), the world hates His followers as well. Therefore Christians are to expect persecution.

Though persecution is to be expected, nonetheless it may still cause a believer to think he has been defeated. But he has not been defeated, for Jesus told His disciples, “take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). In other words the Christian, as a result of His Savior’s victory, is a victor as well (Rom. 8:37). So though he may experience mistreatment and/or even death, this is not defeat, for nothing can remove him from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:31-39). The disciples of Jesus are assured that in the future they will see their King Jesus sitting upon His throne in His earthly kingdom in which they will rule with Him

(Rev. 5:9-10; 20:6). Additionally, at the end of the tribulation period (Mat. 25:41-46) and at the end of His earthly reign, Jesus will judge the wicked (Rev. 20:11-15; 22:12). Thus no one will escape what is due them for their wicked mistreatment of God's children!

### *Persecution is a Tool of God*

It is important to remember that it is God's desire to perfect, or in other words to bring His children to maturity during their lifetime (Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:11-16). Trials are often a tool which God uses to accomplish this task (Jam. 1:2-4; 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 1 Pet. 5:10). Please understand that God does not take pleasure in a believer's suffering. In the case of persecution, God will bring to judgment those who persecute His children (2 Thes. 1:6-10; 1 Pet. 3:16). Yet God does call His followers to suffer on His behalf (Php. 1:29; cf. Acts 5:41), and for this He will richly reward them (Luke 6:22-23). Thus taking His children through a controlled time of persecution is one of the ways He perfects them. Why is it a "controlled time of persecution"? Because God is there with His child who is being persecuted, during each moment, through each step, and through each situation he faces. God can stop it at any point along the way if He so desires; it is He who is in ultimate control. When one understands God's ultimate purpose for His children, using the things they face in life to perfect (Jam. 1:2-3) and test them (1 Pet. 1:6-7), then the one experiencing persecution can know that God will work all of these things out together for good (cf. Rom. 8:28). Understanding this it is then that he can pray, "Father, accomplish your will thought me as You desire."

When considering these truths, the words of Philippians 1:27-30 bring much encouragement:

"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His

sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.”

These are amazing words! Paul’s words which are most compelling are that they would be “in no way alarmed by” their opponents if they conducted themselves “in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ,” and “to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake” to suffer.

When considering the first phrase of not being alarmed by one’s opponents, for most this seems difficult to comprehend, especially when their lives are in danger. Yet according to Paul, they do not need to be alarmed in the midst of such an ordeal, “which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God.” A similar passage which gives insight into the reason why believers do not need to be alarmed is 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. *This is* a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed.”

In this passage are three important facts which the persecuted believer can be assured and find encouragement in. Paul makes it clear that enduring persecution for Christ’s sake is confirmation of: 1) the believer being found worthy of the



kingdom of God; 2) the destruction of the wicked who are persecuting him; 3) relief from his affliction at Christ's second coming. Therefore the righteous can rejoice in these things and look forward to the future judgment when they will receive justice, satisfaction and recompense for their suffering. The result of their suffering will not gain them the kingdom of God, for this is obtained as a result of the cross; on the contrary their suffering will prove their worthiness of the kingdom, their willingness to suffer for Christ's sake. The wicked on the other hand will prove though their persecution of the righteous that they do not deserve the kingdom of God. Thus they will receive their due recompense as well, "eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

In regards to the other phrase found in Philippians 1:29 -- that it was granted for Christ's sake, "not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake," -- these may be marvelous words for some while troubling for others. The fact that it has been granted for Christ's sake to believe is a wonderful truth to cling to and cherish. However the companion truth -- that it has been granted, or in other words graciously bestowed upon believers to suffer for the sake of Christ -- may not bring a lot of comfort. Yet this truth should not be forgotten. As the Apostle Paul was chosen to suffer when taking the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:16), so believers throughout the Church age have been chosen for the same purpose which Paul makes clear in this passage. To suffer persecution for Christ is a decision and choice of God for a special group of believer. As it will be seen later in this book, such people will be rewarded exceptionally by God. Understanding this gives one a greater sense of appreciation for the words of Jesus in Luke 6:22–23.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets."

Blessed are you! Be glad! Leap for joy! Your reward is great in heaven! Therefore when a believer faces persecution, he must fix his "eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the

shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Heb. 12:2–3). Believers are not to grow weary! They are not to lose heart! They are to remember Jesus and His love for them which He demonstrated through His suffering when He died to redeem them! How wonderful to be found worthy as a disciple of Jesus who has been chosen to suffer for His sake. This attitude is seen in the Apostles after they were taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin, “...after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name” (Acts 5:40-41).

#### *Nothing can Remove You from the Love of Christ*

Another great truth which should bring comfort to the person who faces persecution for his Savior is found in Romans 8:35–39.

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Your sake we are being put to death all day long; We were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing! Absolutely nothing can remove a follower of Jesus from the love of God. Not “tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword;” not even himself (i.e., “nor any other created thing”). What a wonderful truth that believers are secure in their relationship with Christ! It is also important for Christians to realize that when they face persecution, they are not being disciplined by God. Discipline is the result of disobedience, whereas persecution is the result of faithfulness. Therefore believers are not unloved by God and Christ because they are experiencing suffering. On the contrary, it is because of Their great love for them that they have been chosen and found worthy to suffer as

Jesus did. Furthermore Paul said, “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” Followers of Jesus are conquerors! Praise the Lord! Keep in mind that one day you who suffer persecution will experience the blessings and rewards of all your suffering for Jesus! Amen!

## Encouraging Help!

When facing persecution, especially when it comes upon believers quickly and unexpectedly, it is important for them to understand the help available to them.

### *The Trinity*

The first thing believers must always keep in mind is that through whatever they face, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit will always be there with them because They indwell them (John 14:16-17,20,23). The Holy Spirit has been given to believers as a Helper who will be with them forever (John 14:16-17), and Jesus promises to be with believers as well. He told His disciples during the time period between His resurrection and ascension and before sending them out into the world, “lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mat. 28:20). Thankfully these words of Jesus go beyond the ministry of the Apostles to this day and continue on until His removal of the Church at its rapture. Knowing that the Trinity resides within a believer, he can know that he has God’s grace available as he relies upon Him. The key word here is “relies” because without the believer’s dependence upon God, he will not be able to draw upon His grace in his life and ministry.

One important provision of God’s grace is boldness. Boldness is an important aspect of our faith, especially when facing persecution. This was something Paul asked the Ephesians to pray for in his life, “and *pray* on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with **boldness** the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in *proclaiming* it I may speak **boldly**, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20, emphasis added).

In other passages the importance of boldness is clearly established as well as its source, that being the indwelling Trinity. In Acts 4:1 it says, “And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and *began* to speak the word of God with **boldness**” (emphasis added). In Acts 14:3 Luke recorded, “Therefore they spent a long time *there* speaking **boldly** with reliance upon the Lord, who was testifying to the word of His grace, granting that signs and wonders be done by their hands” (emphasis added). Lastly, in 1 Thessalonians 2:2 Paul wrote, “but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the **boldness in our God** to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition” (emphasis added). Without the empowerment, strength and boldness of God, how could a believer be useful for God in the midst of persecution? He could not. Without the grace of God, he would have a spirit of fear and timidity. Therefore the indwelling Trinity and Their empowerment are crucial to the believer.

The Apostle Paul, as a special chosen instrument of Jesus, experienced this truth in a very unique way. On one occasion when Paul was frightened and needed encouragement, Jesus spoke the following to him in a night vision, “Do not be afraid *any longer*, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:9–10). On another occasion when an angry mob wanted to kill Paul, Luke wrote, “But on the night *immediately* following, the Lord stood at his side and said, ‘Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also’” (Acts 23:11). Paul when speaking to Timothy about another situation he faced stated, “At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion’s mouth” (2 Tim. 4:16–17). Although in this last instance Paul was not referring to a physical appearance by Jesus in his defense before Nero, nonetheless Jesus was there with Paul strengthening him through this difficult time. Christians can thus be encouraged that they are never alone, for their Triune God is always with them.

Though the Trinity indwells and empowers believers, the Scriptures are clear on how important the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit is to them for He was sent as a Helper (I Cor. 12:13; cf. John 14:16-17; 16:7). As a Helper, when a believer is walking in the Spirit (Gal. 5:15), or in other words filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), he is able to live a victorious Christian life. On the other hand, if a believer is involved in things which grieve (cf. Eph. 4:30) and/or quench (1 Thes. 5:19) the Holy Spirit, he will lack His help in all that he does. A follower of Jesus ought always to strive to walk “in a manner worthy of the calling with which” he has “been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). Such a life will ensure that the believer is filled with the Holy Spirit and able to minister in the power of God. When facing persecution, such empowerment is necessary in order to live shrewdly and innocently.

### *Wisdom*

Another encouraging truth which a believer can always lean on is found in James 1:1–12. In this passage James instructs his readers, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials” (vs. 2). Persecution would definitely fit the category of trials. Though facing trials is not pleasurable, the results gained by going through them are, that being endurance and maturity (“perfect and complete, lacking in nothing,” vss. 3-4). This then is the reason James tells his readers to “consider it all joy” when facing trials. Consequently having to persist through trials associated with persecution teaches a believer how to endure. As he endures, he grows in his faith becoming more mature, more perfect, and more complete. This completeness will equip him so that he will be “lacking in nothing.” Thus persecution is an instrument which ultimately helps assist believers to become strong in their faith.

As James continues, he tells his readers that if they lack wisdom when facing trials, not knowing how to cope and respond, they only need to ask God for His help. In doing so they can be assured that the wisdom of their almighty, all-wise, all-knowing God will liberally be given to them, and without reluctance (vs. 5). James describes the wisdom they will receive as follows: “But the wisdom from

above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy” (Jam. 3:17). Such wisdom is needed in times of trial, or at any time for that matter, for it is absolute, perfect, and complete.

However, in association with asking for wisdom, James gives his readers a strong warning. He tells them that when they ask they need to ask in faith, without doubting God. Why? Because the book of Hebrews says, “without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). God rewards those who ask in faith. So the believer who asks God for wisdom must believe that He:

- is the One he must turn to for wisdom
- knows the best way to respond to his situation
- is a generous giver who wants to help him in his time of need
- will follow through and give him the requested wisdom

Consequently asking God for wisdom without faith, doubting Him in any manner, questioning if He will really answer, if He will give the desired advice (the advice I expect or want), or if He truly cares about my situation, will not bring Him pleasure, only displeasure. Or if the person asks only because he knows that it is the right thing to do, not because he really wants to know God’s answer (“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives....” Jam. 4:3), such a person “is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (Jam. 1:6–8). So the person who asks must do so believing. The words of Peter sum up this concept of trusting God very well:

“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.” (1 Pet. 4:19, emphasis added)

Entrusting God with one's soul while "doing what is right," especially in a time of persecution, is a key element to a believer's spiritual growth even if it may end in martyrdom. Yet for those who endure through the entire trial, the result of that process (enduring which produces maturity which in turn produces perseverance) is in itself a reward. James states, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (Jam. 1:12, NIV84, emphasis added). As a result of coming through a trial by means of God's wisdom, this person will receive the "crown of life." This is a reward which he will receive in this life at the end of his trial. This reward probably refers to having a more abundant life (John 10:10) accompanied by enhanced wisdom, the product of possessing a greater completeness and maturity. Such a character quality will bring honor to its possessor as a crown of jewels would to a king, for such a character quality which will be witnessed in his life and admired by others.

As a precaution, a believer should understand and accept that when facing trials God may give him wisdom that he does not want to follow. The wisdom given may be awkward, difficult, embarrassing, unpleasant, or even painful to follow. It may mean that the person who prayed for this wisdom may need to humble himself to carry out what God wants. In the case of persecution, God's wisdom could literally lead a person to physical harm or even death (e.g., declaring truth like the prophet Zechariah in 2 Chr. 24:20-21), as believers are sheep to be slaughtered (Rom. 8:36). When one asks God for wisdom, he must decide beforehand if he will obey God, even if imprisonment or death could be the result. Understanding that God is the One who decides his ultimate fate and not those persecuting him, he can with peace trust God for His wisdom and His outcome (1 Pet. 4:19).

### *Grace*

While facing persecution, understanding the grace of God is paramount. The aspect of God's grace which will be focused on here is the enablement or empowerment given by God to function effectively in the Christian life (e.g., 2 Cor. 8:1; Eph. 3:8). For instance, God the Holy Spirit gives believers a spiritual gift ("grace") at salvation to employ in ministry (Rom. 12:3,6-8; Eph. 3:1-3; 1 Pet.

4:10). As well, the “grace” given each believer defines who they are in the body of Christ as each believer has a different role to play (1 Cor. 12:14, 18, 28-30). In other words, some such as the Apostles received more grace than those who were not Apostles (referring to their gifts, abilities and positions in the body of Christ, cf. 1 Cor. 15:10). Without this grace, a believer would not be able to produce spiritual fruit or live the Christian life victoriously (cf. Stephen, who was filled with faith, the Holy Spirit, grace and power; Acts 6:5,8). Thus Paul told Timothy, “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:1). When facing persecution, relying on the grace of God is necessary to have victory.

Obviously from Paul’s statement to Timothy, grace is important for the believer; Paul knew this from personal experience. In 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Paul tells of God’s decision to keep him humble. To do this God had given Paul “a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment” to keep him from exalting himself (vs. 7). Whatever this thorn was (maybe poor eyesight, Gal. 6:11), it hindered Paul to the point where he had asked God three times that it might leave him (vs. 8). What was God’s response to Paul? “And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness’” (vs. 9a-c). In other words, the grace of God was totally sufficient for Paul to be able to cope with the thorn he had been given. When Paul came to realize that the grace given him was sufficient he wrote, “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (vs. 10). The grace which Paul appropriated is the same grace believers have today, and it is this grace which can enable them to be content when facing weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecution, and difficulties for Christ’s sake. Therefore in these things believers can say as Paul did, “when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Another aspect of grace is found in Hebrews 4:15-16.

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet



without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Jesus understands the imperfections of His brethren. He understands all of their weaknesses, having been tempted in all things though found to be without sin. Because of His experiences and understanding, believers are able to draw near with confidence to “the throne of grace.” Other ways in which this might be stated is that believers can confidently approach the:

- Throne of favor
- Throne of lovingkindness
- Throne of goodwill

The combination of these phrases brings out the essence of the grace a believer receives when coming before the throne of grace via prayer. For it is there that believers “may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” It is a place of favor due to the lovingkindness and goodwill of God for His children. So the child of God who in sincerity cries out to his Heavenly Father through his Mediator (2 Tim. 2:5) and Intercessor Jesus Christ (Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1) can know for certain that God will listen, show mercy and give the grace needed to help him through his time of trial. This is God’s promise, God’s encouragement, and God’s help!

For the purpose of making this portion on grace more convenient and useful, it is summarized below:

1. Grace is an enablement

God has given each believer an enablement called grace by which he can live the Christian life and carry out fruitful ministry.

2. Grace is given in different proportions

The amount of grace given each believer will be proportionate to the ministry God has given him.

3. Grace is sufficient

In every situation a believer finds himself, God's grace is sufficient for what he is facing.

4. Grace is a reliance

Whenever a believer finds himself in weakness, if he relies on God's grace, he will actually become strong.

5. Grace is appropriated

To appropriate grace a believer needs to be filled with and walking by the Holy Spirit.

6. Grace assists

Whenever a believer needs assistance, he can go before the throne of grace to receive mercy and grace to help him.

Therefore when facing persecution, the follower of Jesus simply needs to look to God -- placing his faith and trust in Him and not in himself -- for God's wisdom, strength, help, etc. Once again, this truth is clearly expressed in 1 Peter 4:19.

"Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right."

Jesus did this by entrusting Himself to God when He was arrested, tried and crucified (1 Pet. 2:23). He looked to His Father, praying to Him in the garden, stating that God's will be done and not His own (Mat. 26:39,42). During this difficult time Jesus did not try to defend Himself when He was falsely accused but remained quiet (Mat. 27:12-14). He answered only when necessary (John 18:19-23,33-37; 19:9-11; Mat. 27:11) for the purpose of fulfilling His mission of going to the cross, for this was the will of His Father (cf. Mat. 16:21-23; John 18:11). He knew with certainty that God His Father could be trusted. Stephen did something similar as he did not defend himself in the face of false accusations but trusted in God and His will. This resulted in his death (Acts 6:8-7:60).

These examples were chosen because they visibly illustrate two individuals who clearly trusted in God and His grace in a time of great need. Though neither defended themselves against false accusations, their responses were according

to the will of God for them in their specific situations. This however does not mean that a believer who is arrested and accused is not allowed to defend himself. On the contrary, the Apostle Paul defended himself various times when in custody (Acts 21:39-22:22; 22:30-23:10; 24:1-21; 25:6-12; 25:23-29; 28:16-22). My point simply is that a believer needs to look to God in time of trial for His grace, wisdom and help, for it is He who ultimately is in control. It is also God's Spirit who Jesus said will give a believer the things to say when he has been handed over to the authorities, for He will speak through him. Therefore believers need not worry (Mat. 10:19-20).

How will a person know if he is appropriating God's grace? Six aspects of a person's faith should be evident:

- He is confessing sin (1 John 1:9)
- His heart does not condemn him (1 John 3:18-22)
- He is living in obedience to the Word of God (John 15:10)
- He is manifesting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23)
- He is a person of faith, hope and love (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thes. 1:3)
- He is bearing much fruit in his life and ministry (John 15:1-6)

Again looking at the life of Stephen, it is obvious that he was such a man. As was mentioned earlier in the book of Acts, "And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people" (6:8).<sup>1</sup> Two verses later it says that Stephen was full of wisdom and directed by the Holy Spirit (6:10). A believer who is filled with and directed by the Holy Spirit will be confessing the sin in his life. The heart of a believer who does not do this will find fault with him and blame him ("condemn"). In other words, his heart will make him aware of his sin

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen was so gifted by God that he was able to perform great wonders and signs. Believers today should not expect to have such spiritual gifts since God gave them to specific believers during the first century when the Church was founded. The miraculous gifts were given for the purpose of authenticating the messengers (Luke 7:20-23; Acts 2:22; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4) and their message (Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3; John 12:18; Acts 8:5-7; Luke 19:37-38) until the time the foundation of the Church was laid and the New Testament was completed (cf. Eph. 2:19-22). After the first century Church history does not record the presence of the sign gifts, including tongues and prophecy and knowledge (cf. 12 Cor. 13:8), miracles, and wonders. Though these gifts had their purpose during the first century Church, the New Testament lists many other gifts that are given by the Holy Spirit to Christians today (cf. Rom. 12:6-8; 1 Pet. 4:11).

so that he will confess it and make amends where necessary. Until he confesses it, he will not be Spirit-filled.

A believer who is Spirit-filled and directed will be obedient to the Word of God and manifesting the fruit of the Spirit -- love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. He will be a person of faith whose hope is in God and who manifests love even to the ones persecuting him. Such a person will bear much fruit as he abides in Christ. If any one of these important aspects of a person's faith is wavering, so will be his dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

At this point it is important to distinguish between a believer who is being persecuted for his faith and a believer who has been arrested for wrongdoing. Peter spoke about this to his readers:

"If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name." (1 Pet. 4:14–16)

Sometimes believers are not "shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves" in their behavior, and they find themselves in trouble with the authorities. When this is the case, they should not say that they are suffering persecution; for they are not, and God knows this. Those who suffer for doing wrong are guilty, and they need to suffer accordingly, but those who suffer for doing right are blessed as both Peter and Jesus said (Mat. 5:10-12).

### *Prayers of the Saints*

One more resource which a believer has when facing persecution is the prayers of the saints. In 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, Paul wrote about a time when he and his companions were in Asia. He said, "we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (vs. 8). Paul further said, "indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust

in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead” (vs. 9). This is another example of what it means to appropriate the grace of God and “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16). They had no one else to turn to which was God’s plan. So they turned to their One and only faithful God, for He alone was their only hope, and He did deliver them from death (vs. 10). As Paul looked to the future, he said that God would continue to deliver them for on Him they had set their hope: “He will yet deliver us, you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through *the prayers of many*” (vss. 10d-11). Here the importance of the prayers of the saints is expressed. Paul said that as the saints prayed for him and his companions that they would be:

- helping them (for future deliverance, in their ministry, etc.)
- bestowing favor on them

He said that their prayers would result in “that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf” (vs. 11). In times of persecution it is important that the Church of Jesus Christ be praying for those being persecuted, thus helping and bestowing favor upon them. The result of this labor (Rom. 15:30-32) can bear much fruit as God listens to and answers the prayers of those praying for the saints who are suffering for Christ’s sake.

## Encouraging Final Remarks!

Persecution is never an easy situation to endure. It can conclude in various ways. Yet whatever the current trial is that you are facing, be encouraged by the words of the Apostle Paul which he wrote at the end of his life just before his martyrdom:

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that

day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:6–8)

Paul knew at the time he wrote this that he would shortly be going home to be with Jesus. As he looked back over his life, he could do so with satisfaction that he had faithfully lived and carried out the ministry which was given him. When he looked to his future with Jesus, he knew what was awaiting him, “the crown of righteousness.” This crown, Paul wrote, would be given not only to him “but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

My brothers and sisters, be encouraged that your suffering for Jesus will not go unnoticed and is not in vain. Jesus who suffered as you are, His Father and the Holy Spirit are there with you through all that you are enduring. They love you greatly and are awaiting that day when They can say to you, “Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master” (Mat. 25:21). As with Paul, there too is laid up for you “the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award” to you on that day.

In conclusion, I would like to end with the words of the Apostle Paul, “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Col. 3:1–2). “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm” (Eph. 6:10-13).

May God richly bless you with His grace in all that you face for His sake!

# APPENDIX

# Contextual Discussion of Matthew

## 10:16-39

When considering the New Testament, it is evident in this passage that Jesus was not referring to the time period before His ascension. In neither this passage nor in the parallel gospel accounts after the Twelve were sent out and returned (Mark 6:12-13,30; Luke 9:6,10), is there any report about them receiving harsh treatment. Actually there is not a report of such treatment anywhere in the gospels of the Twelve, only of Jesus Himself. Even after the Twelve returned, Jesus sent out seventy others before Him to all the places He Himself would visit (Luke 10:1). He told them as He did the Twelve (Mat. 10:16) that He was sending them out as “lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:2-3). Yet upon their return they were joyous and spoke of the miraculous things they had done (Luke 10:17), but not of persecutions. Thus it is understood that Jesus was informing the Twelve about what their future held and how they were to act in accordance with it.

When applying this passage, it is necessary to determine if the text applied only to the Twelve or to a broader audience. Some may believe that what Jesus said in this passage was specifically for the Twelve; and if correct, much of this text does not apply to anyone else. This may very well be the correct interpretation if this passage and/or a parallel passage were spoken only to the Twelve disciples. But since the truths of this passage are repeated in other contexts (in the gospels of Mark and Luke), this reveals that it was meant for all disciples of Christ. The chart below helps establish this fact.

Of Matthew 10:16-39, all of the verses are repeated in other contexts except for verses 23 and 25.

Matthew 10:16	Luke 10:3	70 disciples
Matthew 10:17-22	Mark 13:9-13; Luke 21:12-17	Eschatological



Matthew 10:23		
Matthew 10:24	Luke 6:40	Crowd of disciples
Matthew 10:25		
Matthew 10:26-33	Luke 12:2-9	Twelve
Matthew 10:34-36	Luke 12:51-53	Twelve
Matthew 10:37-38	Luke 14:26-27	Large crowd
Matthew 10:39	Luke 17:33	Disciples

For the most part, everything that Jesus said here is general in nature and could apply to any believer during the Church age. The central question however revolves around verses 19 and 20. Specifically, when Jesus said the following to the Twelve, where His words referring to inspiration:

- 19 "But when they hand you over, do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say.
- 20 "For it is not you who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you.

In particular, was Jesus asserting that when the Twelve would stand before the authorities on His behalf and the Holy Spirit would speak through them that they would be speaking authoritatively? In other words, would what they say be the equivalent of Scripture? If so, then is this why they did not have to plan what they would say in their own defense? What about believers other than the Twelve? When they stand before the authorities, do these verses apply to them as well? Should they plan their defense or are they not to worry about what they are to say for the Holy Spirit will speak through them?

The answer to this dilemma seems to lie in the fact that Matthew 10:17-22 has two parallel passages: Mark 13:9-13 and Luke 21:12-17. What sets these passages apart from Matthew 10 is that they are both eschatological in nature, both focusing on the Tribulation Period. In other words, Jesus was telling believers who would live in the far distant future that what He told the Twelve would be true for them as well. Because of this, it is my opinion that the truths presented here are not meant just for

the Twelve, but for believers throughout the Church age and Tribulation Period. Therefore they are presented in this book from this prospective.

# Observations about Persecution from the Book of Acts

When studying the book of Acts, it is observed that persecution did not break out as the result of ostentatious behavior on the part of its recipients. In each case those persecuted were simply carrying out their ministries. As a result of the reasons listed below, persecution broke out against them when others:

- disagreed with what they were teaching (Acts 4:1-3; 8:1-3; 9:28-29; 14:1-4; 18:12-15; 21:27-31; 22:21-24)
- were unable to successfully argue against them (Acts 6:9-12; 9:21-23)
- were jealous of them (Acts 5:12-18; 13:44-51; 17:1-5, 11-13)
- lost financial gain because of them (Acts 16:16-20; 19:23-41)

From the texts referenced above, those persecuted were acting wisely and innocently in their behavior. In other words, they were not acting in an unrighteous or questionable manner as they ministered for the Lord which then resulted in the outbreaks against them. In the course of their ministry people reacted, and as a result they were persecuted. Therefore one can never exactly predict what might be the trigger which ignites persecution. Since this is the case, a servant of God simply needs to carry out his ministry with shrewd, innocent behavior while trusting God each step of the way. If persecution occurs, then he must look to God for His sustaining grace and help. The only other option a believer has to avoid potential persecution is to do nothing, which is not the will of God.

Another observation from the book of Acts is that when believers were seized by the authorities, they appeared before them and gave an account for the hope that was in them. They did not flee. In the case of the Apostles, they appeared willingly without force when summoned before the Sanhedrin (cf. Acts 5:17-27). Though there were times they did flee, it was only when they saw the threat of persecution before it actually occurred (i.e., Acts 8:1; 9:22-25; 9:28-30; 12:1-17; 14:4-7; 14:19-22; 17:13-

14). They never fled after having been arrested or charged by the authorities, except in the case of Peter who was supernaturally released from prison by God before he was to be executed (Acts 12:6-11). Otherwise they always did as was required of them by law. It is interesting to note that when they fled, they continued to preach the gospel in the places where they went (i.e., Acts 8:4; 9:28; 14:7; 17:15-22).

It is important to note as well that, after being seized, sometimes they used the laws of the land to their advantage. Three cases where Paul utilized the laws to his advantage are recorded in Acts Chapters 16, 22 and 25. In Acts 16 after Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and imprisoned (vss. 22-24), Paul refused their release by the authorities. Paul did this because they had been mistreated according to the laws of Rome. They did however leave the jail and the city on Paul's terms, not those of the authorities (vss. 35-40). It is interesting to note that Paul did not use his rights as a Roman citizen to keep himself from being beaten in the first place, though maybe there was such a frenzy at the time that he was unable to demand his rights.

In Acts 22 before Paul was to be scourged to gain information from him about why the Jews were reacting so wildly against him, he asserted his Roman citizenship. As a result he was not scourged (vss. 23-29). In Acts 25 when Paul was asked if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial, he raised his objections against this and then exercised his lawful right by appealing to be tried before Caesar, which was granted (vss. 7-12). Paul did this because he knew that if he returned to Jerusalem, more than likely the Jews would try to kill him (Acts 23:12-24), which was indeed their plan (Acts 25:1-3).

In conclusion, when standing before the authorities, believers may exercise their legal rights according to the law if they so desire. As in the case of Paul however, there may be those times when you may simply accept mistreatment for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ. May God grant you wisdom in each situation you face!

# Persecution and the Church

*“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed;  
for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard  
what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”  
(2 Tim. 1:12)*

## I. Theology of persecution

- A. It is to be expected if one lives godly- 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:12-13
- B. It is the result of following Jesus - Mat. 10:21-22; John 15:18-23; 1 John 3:13
  - 1. Because the world hated Jesus first it hates believers - vs. 18; Mat. 10:21-22; 1 John 3:13
  - 2. Because the world loves its own it hates those chosen by Jesus - vs. 19
  - 3. Because the world persecuted Jesus it will persecute believers - vs. 20
  - 4. Because the world does not know and hates God and Jesus it does these things - vss. 21-23
- C. It is the believer's calling, to suffer for doing what is right - 1 Pet. 2:20-21
- D. It is granted as favor to believers to suffer for the sake of Christ - Php. 1:29-30
- E. It is something believers can enter into confidently - 2 Tim. 1:7-9
  - 1. Because we do not have a spirit of timidity - vs. 7
  - 2. Because we have a spirit of power - vs. 7
  - 3. Because we have a spirit of love - vs. 7
  - 4. Because we have a spirit of discipline - vs. 7
- F. It has the result of freeing a believer from the lusts of the flesh to live for the will of God - 1 Pet. 4:1-2
- G. It is a sign of a believer's victory in Christ - Rom. 8:37
- H. It is a privilege/blessing - Mat. 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23; 1 Pet. 4:12-14
  - 1. Because he belongs to God - Mat. 5:10-11; Luke 6:22; 1 Pet. 4:14
  - 2. Because his reward in heaven will be great - Mat. 5:12; Luke 6:23
    - a. Therefore he should rejoice and be glad - Mat. 5:12; Luke 6:23; 1 Pet. 4:13-14
    - b. Therefore he should leap for joy - Luke 6:23; 1 Pet. 4:13-14

- I. It cannot remove a believer from Christ and His love - Rom. 8:35-39
- J. It is a life of faith - Heb. 11:6, 24-40
- K. It needs to be a life of discipline - Mark 8:34-35; Rom. 12:12
  - 1. Taking up one's cross daily - Mark 8:34-35
  - 2. Persevering in tribulation - Rom. 12:12
- L. It is a means of testimony to unbelievers as they observe - Mark 13:9
- M. It separates true and false believers - Mark 4:14-17; 8:34-38; 2 Thes. 1:5
  - 1. False believers will fall away - Mark 4:14-17
  - 2. False believers Jesus will be ashamed of - Mark 8:35,38
  - 3. True believers will be willing to suffer and give their lives - Mark 8:34-37; 2 Thes. 1:5
- N. It produces perseverance and endurance which clearly shows that a person is a true believer thus deserving of the kingdom of God - 2 Thes. 1:4-5
- O. It is a struggle against demonic forces, not people - Eph. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:26; 1 Pet. 5:8
- P. It is the righteous will of God - 1 Pet. 4:19
- Q. It results in God Himself perfecting (maturing), confirming (to make a firm decision about), strengthening and establishing (making stable) a believer - 1 Pet. 5:10
- R. Its outcome is in God's hands - 2 Tim. 3:10-11; cf. Heb. 11:35-37
  - 1. He may deliver you - 2 Tim. 3:10-11
  - 2. He may not deliver you - cf. Heb. 11:35-37

## SUMMARY:

Followers of Jesus who live godly can expect to face persecution as their Savior did. The world hated Jesus and does not know the Father, therefore it will hate and persecute Jesus' disciples. Hence, it is the believer's calling to suffer for doing what is right. Yet, though persecution is the result of one's association with Christ, it is also a favor granted to him to suffer for Jesus' sake, for he is following in the steps of his Savior. The results of his suffering are many. A direct result will be that God Himself will perfect (mature), confirm (to make a firm decision about), strengthen and establish (make stable) him in his faith. His persecution will also help free him from the lusts of the flesh so that he can instead in a greater way live for the

will of God. Such a person is privileged, blessed and should be glad, rejoicing and leaping for joy because his reward in heaven will be great.

Persecution is also a sign of the believer's victory in Christ. Therefore he can enter into persecution confidently, knowing that from God he was prepared for this, being given a spirit of power, of love, and of discipline, not having a spirit of timidity. This is important because he is constantly in a struggle against demonic forces. This is why his life is to be one of faith and discipline, willingly taking up his cross daily and persevering in persecution. His life will be a testimony before unbelievers as they observe him. It will also be a means by which true believers and false believers will be identified, for true believers will willingly to suffer and give their lives to death for Christ. True believers will also persevere and endure in their sufferings which clearly show that they belong to God and are therefore worthy of the kingdom of God. The false believer on the other hand will fall away and be ashamed of Christ.

Believers facing persecution can know that their suffering is within the righteous will of God. They can also be assured that what they are facing can never remove them from Christ and His love, for in Christ they are secure. They can also know that whatever the result of their persecution (life or death) they and the result is in God's righteous hands.

## II. Attitudes/behavior in persecution

- A. Always remember in Whom you have believed and be not ashamed, for He will bring you to Himself one day - 2 Tim. 1:12; 4:18
- B. Believers are to join in the suffering of the gospel according to (in or by) the power of God - 2 Tim. 1:7-8
  - 1. Because we do not have a spirit of timidity - vs. 7
  - 2. Because we have a spirit of power - vs. 7
  - 3. Because we have a spirit of love - vs. 7
  - 4. Because we have a spirit of discipline - vs. 7
- C. Prepare yourself carefully to suffer in the flesh so you will no longer live for the lusts of the flesh, but for the will of God - 1 Pet. 4:1-2
- D. Believers are to suffer as Christ suffered - 1 Pet. 2:21-23
  - 1. For when being insulted He did not return insults - vs. 23

2. For when suffering He made no threats - vs. 23
  3. For He kept entrusting Himself to His Father who judges righteously- vs. 23
- E. Through many tribulations believers must enter the kingdom of God - Acts 14:21-22
  - F. Persecution is a sign of a believer's victory in Christ, not a sign that he has been removed from the love of Christ - Rom. 8:35-39
  - G. Always remember you are in the midst of wolves (Mat. 10:16a)
  - H. Be shrewd and innocent in your behavior (Mat. 10:16b-c)
  - I. Beware of men (Mat. 10:17)
  - J. Realize that you may be brought before the authorities (Mat. 10:18)
  - K. Do not worry when you are before authorities (Mat. 10:19-20)
  - L. You are hated by the enemies of Jesus (Mat. 10:21-22)
  - M. When being persecuted, flee if you have the chance (Mat. 10:23)
  - N. Expect persecution (Mat. 10:24-25)
  - O. Do not fear when facing persecution (Mat. 10:26-31)
  - P. Do not be alarmed by persecution; your confidence being a sign of destruction of your opponents - Php. 1:28; 1 Pet. 4:12
  - Q. With all boldness Christ is to be exalted in your body whether by life or by death - Php. 1:20
  - R. The joy of the Holy Spirit can accompany persecution - 1 Thes. 1:6
  - S. Be glad, leap for joy, you are blessed, for your reward is great - Luke 6:22-23, 1 Pet. 4:13-14
  - T. Go beyond what is expected/normal in your persecution - Mat. 5:39-48; Luke 6:27-36
    1. Do not resist the evil person - Mat. 5:39
    2. Turn the other cheek - Mat. 5:39; Luke 6:29
    3. Give your coat, not just your shirt if they ask - Mat. 5:40; Luke 6:29
    4. Go the extra mile - Mat. 5:41
    5. Give and borrow to those who ask of you expecting nothing in return - Mat. 5:42; Luke 6:30,35
    6. Demand nothing in return from those who take from you - Luke 6:30
    7. Love your enemy - Mat. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27,35
    8. Pray for those who persecute you - Mat. 5:43-48; Luke 6:28



9. Do good to those who hate you - Luke 6:27,35
  10. Bless those who curse you - Luke 6:28
  11. Treat others the same way you want them to treat you - Luke 6:31; Mat. 7:12; Gal. 5:14
  12. Be like your Heavenly Father and your reward will be great - Luke 6:35-36
- U. Treat those who persecute you with lovingkindness - Rom. 12:14-21
1. Bless them and do not curse them - vs. 14
  2. Do not pay back evil with evil; do what is right in the sight of all men - vs. 17
  3. Be at peace with them - vs. 18
  4. Never take revenge upon them; this is God's responsibility - vs. 19
  5. If they are hungry or thirsty, feed them and give them drink; this may result in their repentance - vs. 20
  6. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good - vs. 21
- V. Do not repay evil for evil, seeking after that which is good for all people - 1 Thes. 5:15
- W. God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him -- Rom. 8:28
- X. Persecution is not to result in fear or a discontinuation of ministry - Acts 4:1-3,18-20,31; 5:27-42; 1 Pet. 3:14; Rev. 2:10
1. One must listen to God rather than man - Acts 4:18-20; 5:29
  2. Boldness in ministry is the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit - Acts 4:31
  3. The result of obeying God may be persecution - Acts 5:40
  4. One needs to rejoice in his persecution, being considered worthy to suffer - Acts 5:41
  5. Even when persecution looms, ministry must continue - Acts 4:18-20; 5:29,42
  6. One is not to fear persecution - 1 Pet. 3:14; cf. Rev. 2:10
- Y. If one denies Christ, Christ will also deny him - 2 Tim. 2:12
- Z. Do not be ashamed, instead glorify God - 1 Pet. 4:16
- AA. Persevere and be strong in faith - 2 Thes. 1:3-4
- BB. God will judge those who afflict you - 2 Thes. 1:6-10

CC. Resist and stand firm in your faith against the devil who desires to devour you

- 1 Pet. 5:8-9

DD. There may be times that a person needs to flee persecution - Acts 9:29-30;

11:19; 17:4-10, 13-14

#### SUMMARY:

As believers face persecution, they must always remember that Jesus has sent them out into the midst of wolves. Therefore they will be hated by His enemies and should expect persecution. As a result they may be taken before the authorities. However they are not to fear or be concerned about what they will say. Though they should beware of men and can flee if the opportunity arises, they are to be willing to enter into the persecution, not having a spirit of timidity, but one of power, of love, and of discipline. They are also to enter it carefully, being shrewd and innocent in their behavior, prepared to suffer in the flesh, for such preparation will result in their no longer living for the lusts of the flesh, but for the will of God. As they suffer they are to suffer as Christ suffered; when insulted He did not return insults, when suffering He made no threats, for He kept entrusting Himself to His Father who judges righteously. For through many tribulations believers must enter the kingdom of God. Though this is the case, believers do not need to be alarmed by persecution, for in actuality their confidence is a sign of destruction of their opponents. It is also a sign of a believer's victory in Christ, not a sign that he has been removed from the love of Christ. So in boldness let Christ be exalted in your body whether by life or by death. This should bring you the joy of the Holy Spirit. Therefore be glad, leap for joy, for you are blessed, for your reward will be great. Know in Whom you have believed and be convinced that Jesus is able to guard your salvation which you have entrusted to Him until that day He brings you safely to His heavenly kingdom, then for this reason you can suffer for Christ and not be ashamed.

When being persecuted, the response of the believer is to go up and beyond what is humanly logical or normal. Jesus taught not to resist the evil person, to turn the other cheek, to go the extra mile. You are to give to them, demanding nothing in return. Yet you are to love, pray for, bless and do good to those who persecute you, treating them the way you want to be treated. You are not to take revenge or pay

back evil for evil, but instead feed them if they are hungry and give water to them if they are thirsty. Such behavior reflects the character of God, and for it your reward will be great, for God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him

Persecution is not a reason to discontinue ministry. On the contrary, it is a result of fear which the believer is not to have. If one denies Christ, Christ will also deny him, so we should never be ashamed of Christ, but instead are to glorify God. Therefore persevere and be strong in faith, resisting and standing against the devil who desires to devour you. Be assured as well that one day God will judge those who afflicted you. Also, if God so leads, remember that there may be those times (as in the life of the Apostle Paul) when you can flee persecution. God will direct in each situation.

### III. Focus of the believer in persecution

#### A. On the Father

1. On entrusting your soul to a faithful Creator - 2 Cor. 1:9-10, 1 Pet. 4:19
2. On the hope and strength which come from Him - 2 Tim. 4:16-18
3. On the power which comes from Him - 2 Cor. 4:7,8-12; Eph. 6:10
4. On His grace which is sufficient in our weakness - 2 Cor. 12:9-10
5. On wearing His armor daily which is crucial - Eph. 6:11-17
6. On glorifying Him - 1 Pet. 4:16
7. On eternity (life with God and all that it contains) - Heb. 10:34,36

#### B. On Christ

1. On living and reigning with Him one day - 2 Tim. 2:8-13,26; 4:18
2. On His comings - Heb. 10:37, 1 Pet. 4:13-14
  - a. When He comes for believers at the rapture of the church - Heb. 10:37
  - b. When He is revealed at His second coming - 1 Pet. 4:13-14
3. On His sufferings for believers - Heb. 12:3, 1 Pet. 2:18-24
4. On sanctifying Him as Lord in one's heart - 1 Pet. 3:14-15
5. On being faithful to Jesus (Mat. 10:32-33)
6. On loving Jesus above all others (Mat. 10:34-39)

- C. On the Word of God -- 2 Tim. 3:10-17
  - 1. On continuing following those things you learned and are convinced of - vss. 14-15
  - 2. On remembering that it is inspired and profitable in your life and ministry - vss. 16-17
- D. On prayer
  - 1. Praying for boldness - cf. Acts 4:31
  - 2. Praying for your enemies - Mat. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-28
    - a. Then you will be like your Heavenly Father who loves and blesses the righteous and unrighteous - Mat. 5:45
    - b. Then you will be mature (holy) like your Heavenly Father - Mat. 5:48
  - 3. Praying for your enemies' forgiveness - cf. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60
  - 4. Others pray for your deliverance -- 2 Cor. 1:11; Php. 1:19; cf. Acts 12:5
  - 5. In your suffering pray; in your cheerfulness sing praises - Jam. 5:13
  - 6. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" - 1 Thes. 5:16-18
- E. On persevering and being faithful - 2 Thes. 1:3-4; Heb. 10:36-39; 11:6,24-27,35-40; 1 Pet. 5:9
- F. On enduring all things for the salvation of others - 2 Tim. 2:8-10
- G. On comforting others in their afflictions resulting from God's comfort to you - 2 Cor. 1:3-5
- H. On your brothers in the world who are experiencing the same sufferings; therefore resist the devil and stand firm in your faith - 1 Pet. 5:9
- I. On the fact that those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame and one day judged - 1 Pet. 3:16; 2 Thes. 1:6-10
- J. On the reward awaiting you - Luke 6:22-23,35; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Heb. 10:34,36; Rev. 2:10

## SUMMARY:

When in the midst of persecution, believers can focus on different things, some that are helpful and others that are not, such as fear and worry. As believers, our focus needs to be on the Father, the Son, on the Word of God and on prayer. We need to entrust ourselves to the Father from whom our hope and strength find

their source. From Him we receive our power and grace in times of weakness. It is He who supplies us with a full armor for protection from the evil one with whom we battle. In the midst of persecution we need to focus on glorifying Him and on eternity which we will spend with Him.

During this time we also need to focus on Christ. We need to remember that one day we will live and reign with Him, that He is coming for His body the church. After this He will return at His second coming. The Christ who suffered for us is victorious; therefore as we consider His sufferings, we are to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts.

The Word of God is crucial for the believer, and it brings special help in times of suffering. Therefore we are to remember that it is God's inspired Word which is profitable, something that the believer should follow and obey. Prayer is also of great importance, for the believer needs to pray for boldness and help in times of persecution. It is also important that others pray for him and his deliverance as well. He is to pray for his enemies, while rejoicing and giving thanks in all things, for this is God's desire.

The suffering believer needs to focus on persevering and being faithful in his persecution. He also needs to focus on the salvation of others, thus enduring for their sake. He should focus on the comfort with which he can comfort others in their affliction, resulting from the comfort he receives in his own suffering. Considering too his Christian brothers who are in the world who are experiencing the same sufferings, he can then focus on their struggles, which will strengthen him to resist the devil and stand firm in his faith. He can take comfort in the fact that those who revile his good behavior in Christ will suffer and be put to shame for it one day. Lastly, he can focus on the reward awaiting him.

#### IV. Encouragement in persecution

- A. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" - Mat. 5:4
- B. In your sufferings for Christ you are blessed - 1Pet. 4:12-14
- C. In the world you have tribulation, but Christ has overcome the world - John 16:33

- D. Your momentary affliction is producing for you an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison - 2 Cor. 4:16-18; Rom. 8:18
- E. God is the God of mercies and all comfort -- 2 Cor. 1:3-5
  - 1. God comforts you in your afflictions so you can comfort others in theirs - vs. 4
  - 2. As your sufferings in Christ are abundant, so also the comfort of Christ is abundant - vs. 5
- F. Remember that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful, so endure as Job and the prophets did for you will be blessed - Jam. 5:10-11
- G. "God has not destined you for wrath, but for obtaining salvation," therefore "encourage one another and build up one another" - 1 Thes. 5:9-11
- H. Favor has been given to you by Christ to suffer for Him - 1 Php. 1:29
- I. "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect (mature), confirm (will firmly decide about you), strengthen and establish you (make you stable)" - 1 Pet. 5:10
- J. "You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near" - Jam. 5:8
- K. Those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame and one day judged - 1 Pet. 3:16; 2 Thes. 1:6-10
- L. God is sovereign and you are ultimately in His hands, not Satan's
  - 1. He is sovereign and rules over all things - I Chr. 29:11-13
  - 2. He does according to His will without hindrance from anyone - Dan. 4:35
  - 3. His purpose and good pleasure will come to pass - Isa. 46:9-10
  - 4. He reigns over all things from heaven - Isa. 66:1-2
  - 5. He is our confidence, thus one can sleep in peace and not fear the onslaught of the wicked when it comes - Pro. 3:24-26
- M. God is omnipresent
  - 1. He is not far from us - Acts 17:27
  - 2. He is always with us wherever we are - Psalms 139:7-12
  - 3. He is with us even in the valley of the shadow of death - Psalm 23:4
  - 4. He hears the cries of the afflicted - Psalm 22:24
  - 5. He watches His own to strongly support them -- II Chron. 16:9
  - 6. He is our refuge, so we need not fear - Psalm 46:1-3

7. He is with us and goes before us, so we need not fear - Josh. 1:9; Isa. 41:10; Duet. 31:8

N. God is omniscient

1. He knows those who are His own - II Tim. 2:19
2. He knows our desires and groans - Psa. 38:9
3. He knows our sorrows - Exo. 3:7-8
4. He knows our righteous ways - II Kings 20:3; Psa. 1:6
5. He knows things before they happen - Isa. 42:9
6. He knows when the sparrow falls - Luke 12:6
7. He knows our every need - Mat. 6:25-34
8. He knows all about us - Psa. 139:1-4
  - a) He has searched us and knows us-- vs. 1
  - b) He knows our every action - vs. 2
  - c) He understands our every thought - vs. 2
  - d) He is intimately aware of our daily activities, either awake or asleep - vs. 3
  - e) He knows our unspoken words - vs. 4

O. God is omnipotent

1. He is God Almighty - Gen. 17:1
2. His greatness is unsearchable - Psa. 145:3
3. He is the God of the impossible - Luke 1:37; Mat. 19:26
4. He can do everything (good) - Job 42:2
5. He finds nothing too difficult - Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17,27
6. He is the God of power - Psa. 62:11
7. He alone is the God of wonders - Psa. 136:4
8. He will accomplish His purpose and good pleasure - Isa. 46:10
9. He works all things after the counsel of His will - Eph. 1:11
10. He carries out His plans - Isa. 14:24
11. He does whatever He pleases - Psa. 135:6
12. He is like no other - Jer. 10:6-7
13. His decrees cannot be overthrown - Acts 5:39
14. He works all things according to His will - Eph. 1:11
15. He is able to deliver His promises - Rom. 4:21
16. He can do all things beyond what we ask of Him - Eph. 3:20

17. He protects and keeps us for salvation - I Pet. 1:5; John 10:29

#### SUMMARY:

Such things as hope and encouragement are important during persecution. As the writer of Hebrews said, "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Therefore it is helpful to be reminded that, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mat. 5:4). Or to remember that those who suffer for Christ are blessed, and that though there are many tribulations in the world, Christ has overcome the world.

Though the persecutions one faces do not generally seem momentary in comparison to what awaits the believer who suffered them in eternity, they are nothing. God is a God of mercy and all comfort, so when your afflictions are abundant in Christ your comfort is abundant as well. So since God is full of compassion and is merciful, when you endure as Job and the prophets did, you will be blessed. "For God has not destined you for wrath, but for obtaining salvation," therefore you can be encouraged by this and "encourage one another and build up one another" with these truths. For favor has been given to you by Christ to suffer for Him, and after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you." So "you too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near."

One other aspect of encouragement in persecution is knowing who our God is. Remembering that God is sovereign, omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent can bring great peace and hope. For we serve a God who rules over all things, who does according to His will without hindrance from anyone. His purpose and good pleasure will come to pass because He reigns over all things from heaven. God is our confidence, thus one can sleep in peace and not fear the onslaught of the wicked when it comes. Remembering too that our Heavenly Father is not far from us, is always with us wherever we are, even in the valley of the shadow of death is comforting. Knowing as well that He hears the cries of the afflicted, that He watches



His own to strongly support them brings hope for He is our refuge. He is always with us and goes before us, so we need not fear.

It also brings encouragement when we realize afresh that the God who knows when the sparrow falls knows our every need. He knows all about us for He has searched us and knows us, our every action, our every thought, being intimately aware of our daily activities. We serve an Almighty God who is a God of the impossible. For Him there is nothing too difficult, for He is the God of power and wonders. He is like no other. His decrees cannot be overthrown for He works all things according to His will. He even protects and keeps us for the day of salvation and will one day bring to judgment those who shame and afflict us. What an awesome God we serve!

#### V. Results of persecution

- A. The continued progress of the gospel - Php. 1:12-13
- B. Growing in trust in the Lord because of your positive example - Php. 1:14
- C. Having more courage to speak the Word without fear because of your positive example - Php. 1:14
- D. Knowing that God Himself will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you in your faith- 1 Pet. 5:10
- E. The great reward awaiting those who faced persecution - Luke 6:22-23,35; 2 Tim. 2:11-12; Heb. 10:34,36
- F. Knowing that those faithful unto death will receive the crown of life - Rev. 2:10
- G. Knowing that those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame - 1 Pet. 3:16

#### SUMMARY:

There are positive results which come from persecution. One is the continuing progress of the gospel. Persecution does not hinder the gospel, but it strengthens and fosters it. If countries want to hinder the gospel, they should simply give freedom and prosperity to the believers. Another result of persecution is that it can cause believers who watch other believers suffer for their faith to grow in their trust in the

Lord, thus having more courage to speak the Word of God without fear. God also promises those who suffer that He will perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish them in their faith, resulting in a more Christ-like character.

Another result of persecution is a great reward for those who face it, for those who are faithful unto death will receive the crown of life. On the other hand, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

## VI. Lessons about persecution from the book of Acts

### A. Peter and John arrested - Acts 4:1-37

1. Peter answered the Jewish leader, being filled with the Holy Spirit - vs. 8
2. Peter proclaimed Jesus to them (with boldness) - vss. 10-13
3. The Jews warned them to no longer speak in the name of Jesus - vss. 17-18
4. Peter and John told them that they could not stop speaking about Jesus - vss. 19-20
5. The Jews threatened them again not to speak in the name of Jesus and then let them go free - vs. 21
6. Peter and John reported these things to their companions which caused them to praise God - vss. 23-28
7. This group of believers then asked God to take note of the threats made against them and to grant them the ability to speak with confidence - vss. 29-30
8. After they prayed they were filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the Word of God, filled with the Holy Spirit and with boldness - vs. 31

### B. Twelve arrested and flogged - Acts 5:17-42

1. The Apostles were arrested for speaking about Jesus - vss. 17-18
2. While in jail during the night, an angel of God miraculously released them and told them to go and preach in the temple, which they did - vss. 19-21
3. The Apostles were recaptured and brought before the Jewish council -- vss. 22-27
4. The Jews reminded them that they were told to no longer speak in the name of Jesus - vs. 28

5. Peter responded by telling the Jews that they must obey God rather than men - vs. 29
6. Peter went on to rebuke the Jewish leaders, making three major points -- vss. 30-32
  - a. Jesus whom they crucified, God raised from the dead - vs. 30
  - b. Jesus is exalted as Prince and Savior to grant repentance for sins - vs. 31
  - c. The Apostles obey God and therefore have the Holy Spirit and are witness of these things - vs. 32
7. Though the Jews wanted to kill the Apostles for what they said, they did not - vss. 33-39
8. The Jews had the Apostles flogged and again warned them not to speak in the name of Jesus - vs. 40
9. The Apostles left and rejoiced for being considered worthy to suffer shame for Jesus - vs. 41
10. The Apostles continued to teach and preach Jesus publically in the temple and from house to house - vs. 42
- C. Stoning of Stephen and the resulting persecution - Acts 6:8-8:4
  1. Stephen was taken into custody by the Jews, and false witnesses testified against him - 6:8-15
  2. Stephen spoke to the council about Israel's history of unfaithfulness (not defending himself), but speaking instead of Israel's rejection of God and those He sent as messengers to Israel - 7:1-53
  3. Stephen then looked into heaven and saw Jesus standing at God's right hand - 7:54-56
  4. Stephen was taken out and stoned to death - 7:57-58
  5. Stephen asked for the forgiveness of those who stoned him as he was being put to death - 7:59-60
  6. One result of this was that a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem - 8:1-3; 9:1-2
  7. Another result was that as many fled the persecution, the Word of God spread as well - 8:4

- D. James killed, Peter jailed and miraculously released - Acts 12:1-19
1. Herod the king arrested some believers to mistreat them - vs. 1
  2. James the brother of John was killed as a result of this persecution - vs. 2
  3. Peter was arrested when Herod saw his actions had pleased the Jews - vss. 3-4
  4. Many people prayed for Peter's release - vs. 5
  5. God delivered Peter from prison - vss. 6-11
  6. The people who prayed for Peter could not believe that God had actually rescued him - vss. 12-16
  7. Peter reported to those present all that happened - vs. 17
  8. As a result of Peter's escape the guards who had guarded him were put to death - vss. 18-19
- E. Paul and Barnabas were driven out of Pisidian Antioch as a result of the Jews' persecution of them - Acts 13:44-52
- F. Paul and Barnabas fled from Iconium at a threat of being mistreated and stoned by both the Gentiles and Jews - Acts 14:1-7
- G. After the healing of a lame man, the people of Lystra thought Paul and Barnabas were gods. After preaching to them, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came and turned the crowds against Paul, stoning him and leaving him for dead. The next day Paul left the area- Acts 14:8-20
- H. Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and thrown into jail in Philippi for casting out a demon in a slave girl who had a spirit of divination. As a result of their imprisonment, the jailer's family believed. Paul and Silas sang with joy in their suffering - Acts 16:16-40
- I. The Jews in Thessalonica, being jealous of Paul formed a mob against him so he had to leave the area - Acts 17:1-10
- J. The Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the Jews there, so Paul once again had to leave the area. - Acts 17:10-15
- K. The Jews in Corinth rose up against Paul to no avail - Acts 18:12-17
- L. The silversmiths and men of similar trades of Ephesus turned against Paul because he turned many people away from idols. Paul then needed to leave the area. - Acts 19:23-20:1
- M. Paul's arrest, trials and transportation to Rome are recorded. As a result of his imprisonment, the gospel continued to progress and other believers who

observed this became stronger in their faith (cf. Php. 1:12-14). Jews and their leaders, Gentiles and Roman leaders, guards and prisoners, and others heard the gospel message from the Apostle Paul during this time of his imprisonment. During this time Paul wrote epistles which were used to spread the gospel and strengthen the churches of Christ. - Acts 21:27-28:31

#### SUMMARY:

There are dominant aspects of these accounts which are fourfold: The first is the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This filling is what gave those persecuted the power to do what they did, and to do it with boldness. The second aspect is that, even when they were told to speak no longer in the name of Jesus, they refused and continued. They could not stop testifying about what they had seen and heard. The third aspect is closely related to the second, this being that even during times of persecution the ministry of the church did not stop. It continued on even in the face of threats and persecutions. In other words, Spirit-filled believers continued to do the ministry in spite of the consequences, trusting God with the results. The last aspect is that even when the consequences brought suffering, the recipients of that suffering rejoiced and glorified God for being found worthy to suffer shame for Jesus' sake.

Other observations include the fact that the Apostles and Stephen were not afraid to speak truth to the Jews about how they were murderers, having crucified the Messiah of Israel, how they resisted the Holy Spirit, and did not follow the Word of God. Even though this brought anger and retribution, because of their Spirit-filling, they boldly spoke the truth.

Another observation is taken from the account of Stephen. When Stephen spoke to the Jewish Council and was stoned by them, God gave him the grace needed in both situations (cf. Acts 6:15; 7:55-56). God's grace is sufficient in everything (2 Cor. 9:8; 12:9), even in times of persecution and death which may result from the persecution (cf. Psalms 23:4).

Also from these passages in Acts we see that in the midst of persecution the gospel continued to progress and the church continued to grow. Persecution will not hinder God or His plans; no one or no situation can stop Him. God will continue to call those who are His out of the world to Himself.

A further observation is that God controls the results of the persecution. In one instance James was put to death, in another Peter was released to escape and move on to other opportunities of ministry. Even in the life of Paul, sometimes he was imprisoned and beaten, even stoned, and other times he learned about the potential of persecution and moved onto a new location without harm. God is in control and knows what a person is capable of and not capable of handling. God also knows the results that He desires in each and every situation.

A final observation is that Satan is working in the world against the gospel. He will stir up those who are his to persecute, slander and attempt to destroy the church of Christ; but ultimately he will not succeed. Jesus is the Victor along with those who are His. Satan may seemingly win some battles, but he already lost the war at the cross.

## VII. Passages which describe persecution/suffering

- A. Christ - "Matt. 2:13; Matt. 12:14, 24 Mark 3:22; Luke 6:11; 11:15; Matt. 16:1 Matt. 26:3, 4, 14–16 [Mark 14:1; 14:48.] Matt. 26:59; Matt. 27:25–30, 39–44 Mark 15; John 19. Mark 3:6, 21; Mark 15:34; Mark 16; 17; Luke 4:28, 29; Luke 7:34; Matt. 11:19. Luke 11:53, 54; Luke 12:50 Matt. 20:22. Luke 13:31; Luke 19:14, 47; Mark 11:18. Luke 20:20 Matt. 22:15; Mark 12:13. Luke 22:2–5, 52, 53, 63–65 Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65. Luke 23:11, 23 Mark 15:14; John 5:16; John 7:1, 7, 19, 20, 30, 32; John 8:37, 40, 48, 52, 59 John 10:31. John 10:20, 39; John 11:57; John 14:30; John 15:18, 20, 21, 24, 25; John 18:22, 23, 29, 30; John 19:6, 15; Acts 2:23; Acts 3:13–15; Acts 4:27; Acts 7:52; Acts 13:27–29; Heb. 12:2, 3; 1 Pet. 4:1" (Note: These references were copied from the "The New Nav's Topical Bible," copyright 1994 by logos Research Systems)

- B. Paul - 2 Cor. 11:23-28; “Acts 9:16, 23–25, 29; Acts 16:19–25 vs. 2:24.; Acts 20:22–24; Acts 21:13, 27–33; Acts 22:22–24; Acts 23:10, 12–15; Rom. 8:35–37; 1 Cor. 4:9, 11–13; 2 Cor. 1:8–10; 2 Cor. 4:8–12; 2 Cor. 6:4, 5, 8–10; 2 Cor. 11:23–27, 32, 33; 2 Cor. 12:10; Gal. 5:11; Gal. 6:17 1 Thess. 3:4. Phil. 1:30; Phil. 2:17, 18; Col. 1:24; 1 Thess. 2:2, 14, 15; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 2:9, 10; 2 Tim. 3:11, 12; 2 Tim. 4:16, 17” (Note: These references were copied from the “The New Nav’s Topical Bible,” copyright 1994 by logos Research Systems)
- C. Books of Acts - 4:1-37; 5:17-42; 6:8-7:60; 8:1-4; 9:1-2; 12:1-19; 13:44-52; 14:1-7; 14:8-20; 16:16-40; 17:1-9; 17:10-15; 18:12-17; 19:23-41; 21:27-28:31
- D. Thessalonians - 1 Thes. 1:6-7; 2:14
- E. Hebrews - Heb. 10:32-34; 11:35-40
- F. Church of Smyrna - Rev. 2:8-11

#### VIII. Advice from church leaders who experienced persecution

- A. Sunday Bwanhot, a Nigerian pastor who has been beaten for his faith and who had friends killed for their faith in northern Nigeria advised:  
It is common that our flesh wants to react to protect oneself. But this is not how we are to respond. You need to be ready to die. This the unbeliever cannot understand. Go boldly as you go. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. Be obedient to the Scriptures. Obey God. He is mighty and powerful. He can rescue people. Do what you should do and trust God. God will use the shedding of blood. We need to be ready to live or die. The Spirit of God will lead you as He did Paul. There is no specific plan for every situation; you need to take each case as it comes. Each situation is different. God gives grace at the point of torture or death, or He will intervene. You will receive His grace at the time of need. You are not alone. God will empower you. More come to church after the persecution. The persecuted church must help itself and be united; it must share its resources. The different groups/denominations need to pull together and set aside their differences to help one another. What happens to one group could happen to another.
- B. Pastor Vitali Kozoubovskii, a Ukrainian Pastor, advised:
  - 1. Share info about meetings you had with government officials

2. When called to a government office - never talk about politics or the authorities
  3. Don't report on other ministers
  4. Commit your family and your life to Christ - completely
  5. Don't deny Christ
  6. Share Christ when called to office of government officials\
  7. Don't fear those who kill the body but cannot destroy your soul
- C. Pastor Pavel, a Ukrainian Pastor, advised:
- Unity is important. People must stick together. There must not be any secrets. If the pastor or a church member is pressured for a bribe, is threatened or anything else by the authorities, he should tell the church so that the members know everything. When one person is alone they can fall, but when the church stands together, they cannot be easily swayed.
- D. A Ukrainian Pastor advised:
- One who faces the persecution ought to do three things:
1. Remember God's promises ("He is always with us at any place"). His promises encourage and strengthen us in any circumstances of life.
  2. Commit your entire life to the Lord
  3. Continue to abide in prayer to God.
- E. A Ukrainian Pastor advised:
1. You have to have prayer meetings with church leaders of the persecuted church.
  2. Teach your church members to pray for those who persecute them and to bless them.
  3. Focus your church members on doing evangelism through doing good works.
  4. Involve your youth in small groups for prayer.
  5. Inspire the church with sermons on topics like, "God will provide" (Gen.22:8), "Deliverance from the Lord" (Ex.14:13), "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil.4:13), and others like these.
- F. A Ukrainian Pastor advised:
1. Be open and sincere before God and the brothers.
  2. Don't be afraid of the enemy because our God is almighty.
  3. Be faithful to the Lord; He is faithful.



G. When asked about evangelism, fellowship and discipleship/training of believers in the time of persecution, Pastor Vitali Kozoubovskii said:

1. How did his church evangelize during persecution without being caught?

Most of the new believers were from Christian families since it was not easy to evangelize. Personal relationships were the key. Since people couldn't trust each other, they were very careful to build friendships before witnessing. God would open the mind of a believer to witness before giving him the opportunity, just as He does today. The only difference was that door-to-door, public crusades or anything like that would not be allowed. There was probably no way to evangelize and not be caught. Even when Christians didn't evangelize they were still called to the government offices many times and questioned anyway.

2. How did they promote fellowship during persecution without being caught?

When you talk about the times of persecution, there was a lot of fear and limits on what you could do. There was a risk, and we did not have a system of methods or suggestions to avoid "not being caught." Instead, it was a matter of making quick decisions right in the midst of the situation; seeking the will of God through prayer and the collective wisdom of the church ministers.

Fellowship is part of being a believer, so people were seeking it anyway because it was understood and taught in sermons. Even when fellowship had to be done in secret in the forests or cemeteries, again, the importance of prayer was understood when looking for creative ways to do it. Therefore the church and its ministers prayed about it. There were of course times when they were caught anyway because the government officials had many spies among believers.

3. How did they disciple/teach believers during persecution without being caught?

Personal relationships, mentorship and small groups were where everyone could know each other, build trust and accountability. The small group movement and one-on-one mentorship is not a new method of ministry. It is biblical and must occur during persecution. In those times our seminary consisted of meetings at night in the cemeteries for Bible study, learning to preach and do ministry. It was spooky, but no one bothered us there.

The next step was twofold: 1) believers found ways of meeting in small groups in secret places; 2) church ministers did their best to find ways to open the church so that they could meet. Sometimes this worked and sometimes it did not. As a note, our congregation existed for 35 years without our own place to worship. We rented from the Seventh Day Adventists. Before that happened, our church had three church buildings taken away from us by the government officials. None of them were ever returned to us. Since it was forbidden to gather outside of the church building, they took away our places of worship for this reason - "to stop the church!"

This document, "Persecution and the Church," is from the book, "Building a Dynamic Church," Second Edition, 2011, Randall Hillebrand.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randy was raised in a Catholic home in the United States. During his childhood he began to question the existence of God, and in his early adult life considered himself an atheist. Later as a result of people speaking to him about Christ, he began to question his beliefs. He read the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament while considering the claims made about Jesus. After understanding that Jesus was who He claimed to be, Randy understood that there had to be a God. It was at this time (August 18, 1982) that he placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ as his Savior.

In the United States Randy was the interim pastor of two small churches which needed assistance and was involved in jail ministry as well as evangelism to the homeless. He later served as the senior pastor of the Bark River Bible Church in Michigan for over eight years. He ministered as an associate of Bible Related Ministries for 10 years (1990-2000), an organization which assists churches in need of help, ranging from providing pulpit supply to pastors, to helping mediate church disputes. Randy and his wife Annette and missionaries in Eurasia, and at the time of this writing live in Kiev, Ukraine for twelve years. Besides Randy's writing ministry, Randy and Annette are involved in training and assisting church leaders and their wives in how to have a more dynamic church.

Randy's educational background includes a degree in electronic technology, a Bachelor's degree in Bible and a Master's degree in Ministry, both from Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL.

Randy's other works include:

- Building a Dynamic Church
- Evangelism: How to Mobilize Your Church
- Various tracts on different topics

These publications are available for download at: [www.hillebrandministries.com/](http://www.hillebrandministries.com/)

**Persecution is a reality for Christians in over 50 countries of the world; and as we move toward the last days, the indication is that persecution will only increase. This is why believers need to know how to respond to this testing of their faith. They need to be ready, for during Church history as well as in current times, persecution has come upon the church so quickly and so unexpectedly that believers in these places did not know how to respond. In one country believers said to me, “We didn’t know how to respond when persecution came, and two years later we still do not know how to respond.” Therefore this book is an answer to this dilemma.**

**This book presents what the Bible has to say about persecution. It contains a study on Matthew 10:16-39 where Jesus warned His twelve disciples about what to expect before sending them out into a world filled with wolves. A comprehensive outline of many aspects of persecution believers need to consider and apply to their lives is also included.**

**May God use this book to help you better understand persecution and how to respond to it. May He also use it to encourage, strengthen and draw you closer to Himself as you face difficult times.**