

THE PERSECUTED

John 16:1-2 I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.

Throughout the course of the Christian faith God's people have been wrongly treated and martyred. God is pleased when His people show that they value Him above everything in the world, and this can happen when they courageously remain faithful amid opposition **for righteousness' sake**.

It is no accident that Jesus should move from peacemaking to persecution because the world loves to hate, and enjoys its prejudices so much, that a peacemaker is not always welcome. Opposition is a normal mark of being a disciple of Jesus, as normal as hungering for righteousness or being merciful (John 15:18–25; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Peter 4:13–14). True righteousness, that righteousness that lifts up Jesus alone, is offensive to the world around us. The reward of these persecuted people is the same as the reward of the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven.

When the Apostle Peter starts his book he also encourages his readers to endure suffering and persecution (1:6–7; 2:18–20; 3:9, 13–17; 4:1–4, 12–19; 5:9) by giving themselves entirely to God (4:19). They are to remain faithful in times of distress, knowing that God will vindicate them and that they will certainly enjoy the salvation that the Lord has promised. The death and resurrection of Christ stand as the paradigm for the lives of believers. Just as Christ suffered and then entered into glory, so too his followers will suffer before being exalted.

Suffering by Christians was nothing new; it was part of a long Jewish heritage. The association of the Messiah being a witness and suffering began as early as the book of Isaiah. A theory of martyrdom rewarded by personal immortality for God's people grew up till it dominated the outlook of the Jews towards the Roman government (4 Macc. 17:8).

This legacy was taken over by Christians. Their willingness to face suffering was intensified by the example of Jesus and by the association of persecution with the longed-for end of the age (Mark. 13:7–13). The Christian persecution took two essential forms:

- *Opposition from the Jews*

This gradually grew in intensity. The preaching of a crucified Messiah whose death was publicly blamed on the Jewish leaders was highly

provocative. Even so, the people were favorable (Acts 2:46f.; 5:14) and the Pharisees moderate (Acts 5:34; 23:6), while opposition arose among the Sadducees (Acts 4:1, 6; 5:17). In AD 44 James was executed by Herod Agrippa, and throughout the book of Acts the Jews appear as Paul's most vehement enemies. This attitude could only have been made worse by the Apostolic Council which repudiated the need for circumcision, and it culminated in the excommunication of Christians at Jamnia in AD 80.

- *Opposition from the Romans*

Rome's attitude toward Christian's underwent a large change as time progressed. At first Rome gave Christians toleration and even encouragement, but this soon gave way to fierce opposition. In Rome there was such unpopularity that by AD 64 that Nero could make them scapegoats for a fire (that some say he set) that destroyed much of Rome. In Bithynia by AD 112 Christianity was a capital offence.

The question becomes Why?

Why if we love others and follow Christ will some people hate us? Answer: Jesus has come into the world as light, but people live in darkness and the light exposes their sin. If you love God to any degree there are people who will not like you because you are reflecting God's light into this darkness. If you walk with God uprightly you, by virtue of your life, will point out the crookedness of those around you. At times people will want to get rid of you because they do not want to repent and change and you will simply bother them.

When we become a measure of God's grace to this world Jesus says we can expect negative reactions; that does not mean we declare a culture war or pick an issue just to get people mad at us, we declare Jesus and love others.

BAPTISMS - TODAY AT 1P
1371 SOLOMON ROAD
Nacho Bar Lunch Afterwards

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY
Starts Wednesday at 9:30a in the Lounge
"Gideon" by Priscilla Shirer

GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE
Friday, April 18th, 8pm
Easter: Sat: 6p, Sun: 8:15, 9:30 & 11a

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