

The Reality of Suffering

- A SPIRITUAL LAW



"Thoughts on Suffering as a Christian."

by

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"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12

A demented, Godless and despotic Nero was on the throne when Paul wrote these lines to his spiritual son, Timothy. Though written in the first century, the absolute spiritual law he described is applicable to all in the "last days" (the whole period of time between the writing of this epistle and the return of our Lord - 2 Tim. 3:1).

To view this spiritual law in its proper perspective, one must examine the immediate context in which it is found. As one reads verses 10-11, we discover Paul mentioning persecutions and afflictions which he experienced in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, as he boldly gave his testimony for Christ. Acts 13 and 14 records the specific malignant hatred of unregenerate hearts for the Gospel and its messenger.

Lystra, being Timothy's home area, would have been especially noteworthy to him. This was the city whose citizens tried to murder Paul under a withering fusillade of stones, but he was miraculously spared from death, though no doubt severely battered, bruised and bleeding.

Paul's example of a bold and aggressive testimony for Christ should be normal for God's children, even in the face of implacable hatred and rejection. Being a consistent, bold witness is part and parcel of "living Godly in Christ Jesus." Faith looks persecution in the eye without blinking, whereas flesh draws back under the pressure and tribulation of persecution. *"Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended"* Matt. 13:21.

One does not have to have a sculpted, muscular frame and the nature of a lion to be a bold witness and endure persecution. Rather, the believer who may have a diminutive frame and little or no physical strength and prowess may be bold as a lion with the girth of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, stability of the Gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:13-17).

To be a poltroon, a "Casper milk toast," a simpering wimp in the Lord's Army is a contradiction in terms. In fact, the Lord categorically expresses His displeasure and disapproval of such unjustified timidity: *"Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him"* Heb. 10:38.

In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul describes for Bible believers our purpose of living, our principle of living and the price of such living. *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."*

Purpose of Godly Living

Use of the word "will" in this passage points to a purposeful choice to faithfully serve Christ. This is a bona fide desire as contrasted with a mere empty profession which will readily assent to a form of religion, but deny its life-transforming power (2 Tim. 3:5).

An outward profession will never produce a relish and zeal for a Godly life (1 Tim. 6:11), because it is fleshly. However, **choosing** a life that pleases God is never mechanical or automatic, it is a firm determination. *"For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."* 1 Pet. 3:10- 12

Note the inclusive term "all." This is an absolute, all inclusive idea with no exceptions. In some way, manner and measure, persecution is the natural and expected lot of the Godly believer. Fiery reaction to my testimony ought to be expected because it is normative, it is not an aberration. A lost world (especially lost religious people) will tolerate any religion or sectarian philosophy, no matter how bizarre or audacious; but will **never** tolerate genuine Christianity. An angry antipathy, total disdain and perpetual enmity will be expressed in innumerable ways toward a bold and genuine faith. Why? Because there exists an unbridgeable chasm and unmitigated hostility between true faith and a lost world.

Metallurgists quickly learn that not all that glitters is gold. There are other metals and minerals that mimic the genuine, but which are false. Similarly, it is not moral, upright or religious souls who will earn the wrath of this unregenerate world; this wrath is reserved for a special class Paul describes as those who "will live Godly."

One can live a moral life, an honest life, or even a profane and profligate life and escape persecution. However, Christ's intervention in a person's life which brings salvation, produces a life of no compromise and absolutes. Such a change is drastic, dramatic and visible. The believer has a new set of values and priorities. Genuine Godliness provokes a hateful response which "religion," carnality and worldliness will never ignite.

The word and concept of "sin" is a vexing irritant to those who resent authentic Christianity. Their evil deeds are exposed by the shining light of Godliness. They will not only not come to the Light, they will try to extinguish the Light.

Godliness, therefore, is not escaping persecution, but expecting it and enduring it. Godliness seeks the will of God, lives as an offering to God and aims at the glory of God.

Principle of Godly Living

Blood-washed believers may live in this world, but are actually residents of another realm, citizens of another country. The mystical sphere in which we live our lives is **"in Christ Jesus."** *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."* Gal. 2:20.

Christ is the source and spring of our life. We daily live in communion with Him. We are governed by His revelation, we are being conformed to His image and actuated by His grace. No wonder we are viewed with hostility by the citizens of this world, our

motivating principle within is beyond their darkened comprehension.

The Price of Godly Living

The Rich Young Ruler had a disquieted soul. He knew he needed more than a moral life. But when he realized the cost of following Christ, he demurred. There is a price to pay for becoming a child of God, and following Him in Godly living. Paul says such ***"shall suffer persecution."***

Since Genesis 3:15, there has been an constant enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This is a classic collision of principles, and hence an eternal antithesis between the principles of this world and the principles of God's Kingdom. Paul stresses the inevitable nature of the price we will pay for our faith. Scars are a part of the price of our loyalty to Christ, and in one sense, our credentials before God. In some form or measure, it will touch us, from the flames of the stake, to a scornful sneer. It may not always be physical. It may be ridicule, ostracism, obstruction, being misjudged, opposed, assailed, slandered. In some way, buffetings and batterings of a hostile world will intrude into our experience.

Why? God knows that when we cherish this world as did Lot's wife, and delight in creature comforts, our desire for the promises of God undergo devaluation. However, when we are stripped of comforts, we look to Him!

Paul explained, ***"we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God"*** Acts 14:22. He uttered these words after having been stoned at Lystra and threatened, with stoning at Iconium. The world is at war with the Kingdom of God, not with false religions. We court persecution only with a **Godly** life. Thus, if our life is too easy, it is not too Godly! The better the believer, the sooner he is persecuted.

Persecution is not always constant. ***"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"*** Prov. 16:7. However, it is our lot to enter into His sufferings (Phil. 3:10), this is part of our mystical union with Him. Suffering is normal, but so is His rescue: power to endure, grace to carry on in spite of pain and pressure, or death as deliverance. We can be *hurt*, but not eternally harmed.

Summary

The very malignancy of evil in an unregenerate heart drives it to hostile action. If to some extent, we are not the object of the world's hatred; if evil despisers do not disparage us, then I must ask, "Am I living Godly?" The extent of my persecution is a barometer of my Godliness!

With no suffering, how can we prove we love Him more than anything else? Just as warfare makes a good soldier, the darkness of affliction makes believers' graces shine. Human acceptance is correlated with and dependent upon my distancing myself from Christ and His cause.

So my friends, it is not failure to suffer. That is a part of the job description for a believer. Vital Christianity is not optimistic or pessimistic, it is realistic. This world is not our friend, and its malevolent hatred ought to be expected as sure as we expect stormy weather to disquiet our plans. The more closely you identify with Christ and His cause, the more you can expect to enter into the fellowship of His sufferings. The carnal believer (such as Lot) will escape persecution because of his worldly compromise and cowardly drawing back, but he will not have a productive testimony, and will be severely disciplined by the Lord (*"He himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire"* 1 Cor. 3:15).

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