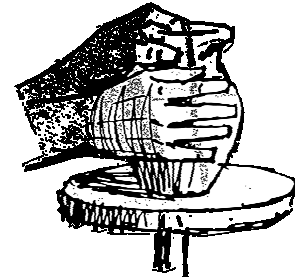


His Workmanship: Westside

*"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works."
—Ephesians 2:10*



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Isaiah 64:8

Blessed Are the Persecuted, Beatitudes, Part 10, by John Piper with John W.

Source and Focus of Persecution.

In the Bible, especially in the New Testament, persecution was so pervasive that it is presented as expected. Jesus, the epitome of righteousness, is also the focal point of persecution. As such, He clearly reveals persecution's source. In John 8 the Pharisees challenged His assertion of who He is, and the ensuing discussion led to revealing the source of opposition. The Jews claimed to be Abraham's descendants and never in bondage to any man (though at the time they were subject to the Romans). Their statement is partly true. Jesus readily acknowledged they were physically Abraham's descendants, but He added in v. 40, "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this." He implied that, if they were truly Abraham's children, their conduct would display his characteristics, and they would not be persecuting Him: *You do the deeds of your father.... You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it,*" Jn 8:41-44. Satan is the

source of persecution of those bearing and living the truth of God. At times he undoubtedly works through people whom he has duped and inflamed to unrelenting anger toward God's people and hatred of the truth so that the persecution appears to be entirely of men. But the Bible reveals the reality of Satan as the source.

Wrong Responses. 2 Tim 3:12 plainly states, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." It is inevitable that the truly righteous must face it, and God exhorts us to respond positively. He condemns negative reactions:

Fear: "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled," 1 Pet 3:14.

Compromise: In the early church, Judaizing teachers tried to circumcise Gentiles, thus forcing them to compromise, Gal 6:12.

Cursing: "Bless those which persecute you; bless and do not curse," Rm 12:14.

Desertion: All the disciples forsook Jesus and fled, Mt 26:56.

Retaliation: "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do no avenge yourselves, but

rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'Therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," Rm 12:17-21.

Apostasy: "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your good, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence which has great reward... But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul," Heb 10:32-35, 39.

Every one of these wrong reactions destroys our stand for God, our character, and our loyalty. Since persecution comes on all who live godly in Christ Jesus, it is no wonder God places so much emphasis on it. Persecution plays a vital role in God's purpose.

For the Sake of Righteousness.

Jesus's phrase in the beatitude, "for righteousness' sake," calls upon us to examine ourselves honestly before

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“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse,” Romans 12:14

God both before and after we are opposed. *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter,”* 1 Pet 4:12:16. Peter, like Jesus, perceived persecution as inevitable and therefore to be expected. Since a disciple is not above His Master, a follower can hardly expect to escape what the Master received.

Human nature dislikes and is suspicious of anyone who is different. A true Christian brings on his own form of unpopularity. It has never been easy, in part because, regardless of where they live, Christians are different. A Christian presents the standard of Jesus Christ to the world. Worldly witnesses to this do not understand exactly why, but it at least irritates them, pricks their conscience, and separates them from the Christian. In some it leads to open anger, rage.

Peter also perceived persecution as a trial to overcome. A person’s devotion to principle can be measured by his willingness to suffer for it. Therefore, since he wrote of true Christians and not those merely in name, persecution will be a test. Compromising with God’s standards will not elicit persecution, because that leads to agreement with the world. Jesus said, *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you,”* Jn 15:19.

God intends persecution to test the Christian’s trust, loyalty, sincerity, courage, and patience. Suffering for righteousness is an honor leading to glory. In fact, Peter said that when we suffer persecution, the glory of God rests upon us. In such an instance, a persecuted Christian falls into the same category as Jesus because all He suffered was for righteousness. We therefore share in the same. However, we must be exceedingly careful we do not suffer because of our own misconduct. A Christian’s life should be his best argument that he does not deserve what is happening to him. Jesus said, *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake,”* Mt 5:11; cf. 1 Pet 2:20; 3:17.

So We See Two Responses to a Righteous Life. The two options are persecution or conversion. *“Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar,”* Mt 23:34-35. *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven,”* Mt 5:16. But, we all know unbelievers who are neither converted nor persecuting—who are just civil, or even polite. Why are we not receiving persecution from them?

Two Explanations Why Neither Response Seems to Appear. One is that your light is under a bushel. You are keeping the stumbling block of the cross well concealed, Gal 5:11; 6:12-13. You don’t let your distinctive values show. The other is that you are letting them show, and the people around you are moving toward one or the other of these two poles: persecu-

tion or conversion. Neither of these may happen immediately. There are all kinds of factors that can hinder expressions of persecution. We see these often in the gospels when the Pharisees were angered but were hindered by expediency from expressing their anger in outright persecution. Neither persecution nor conversion will always happen immediately. In fact, many people are torn inside themselves, partly hating the claims of Christ in your life, partly attracted by them. So we should all examine ourselves to see if we are playing a kind of cowardly Christian incognito. If so, we should repent and resolve to be more sincere in the expression of who we really are. But we must not assume that, because there is no persecution right now and no conversion right now, the fault must lie with us. The gestation period for the new birth may be nearing a happy end. Or the storm may be ready to break against you. But in either case you can be very content. Which leads us to our other consideration:

The Blessedness of the Persecuted. *“Blessed—favored—are you when men revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad,”* 5:11. Now this is a shocking piece of counsel. What can possibly justify the command to be glad when we are hated and mocked and tortured and killed? And make no mistake about it—Jesus does have death in view here. This is what they did to the prophets, Mt 23:30; 1 Kg 18:13; 19:10; Neh 9:26; Jer 26:23. This is what they would do to the disciples. So He said, *“Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake,”* Mt 24:9.

Why This Shocking Counsel from Jesus? continued on p. 3



Let your faith be seen in 2014
 "I rejoice to see your good order
 and the steadfastness of your faith
 in Christ."
 —Colossians 2:5

Persecuted, from p. 2 What can justify such counsel to people in pain? —"Rejoice and be glad!" We see two possibilities: either this is the talk of an insensitive, sophomoric, ivory tower theologian who has never known what it is to scream with pain, or this is the talk of one who has seen something and tasted something and knows something about a reality that most people have never tasted or glimpsed.

This is the Lord speaking. It is not some pastoral novice that blunders into a funeral home slapping people on the back, saying, "Praise God, anyhow." This is the Lord. And He said to His disciples, most of whom will drink the cup of martyrdom, "Rejoice and be glad" when you are persecuted, when you suffer. How can He say this? He can say it because He knows beyond any shadow of a doubt that the reward of heaven will more than compensate for any suffering we must endure in the service of Christ. "Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven." There is a mystery here—the mystery of joy in the midst of agony; the mystery of gladness in the midst of misery and groaning. And this mystery is contained in faith—the bedrock assurance that heaven is a hundredfold compensation for every pain. To the degree that you believe what Jesus sees in heaven, to that degree you will be able to rejoice and be glad in suffering. "Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven."

Suffering's Relationship to Reward in Heaven. But this raises a question: In order to rejoice and be glad in the suffer

Discipleship Here At Home

ing of persecution, must you not believe that the suffering itself enlarges your reward in heaven? If the same reward in heaven could be obtained without suffering, would we not cry out against the uselessness of suffering rather than being glad to embrace it? If nothing more comes of suffering than of not suffering, why embrace it with joy? What gave Rowland Taylor and Nicholas Ridley and John Bradford the impulse to kiss the stakes where they were burned? What moved Obadiah Holmes, after ninety lashes turned his back to jelly for Jesus, to say to the magistrates, "You have struck me with roses"? Why did Thomas Hardcastle say that persecution is "a precious season of grace"?

The answer must be that the more your faith is tested through suffering, the greater will be your reward. "And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life," Mt 19:29. Paul said that affliction "prepares" or "brings about" an eternal weight of glory. "For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen," 2 Cor 4:17-18.

As Charles Hodge said, "Afflictions are the cause of eternal glory. Not the meritorious cause, but still the procuring cause. God has seen fit to reveal his purpose not only to reward with exceeding joy the afflictions of His people, but to make those afflictions the means of working out that joy," Commentary on Second Corinthians, p. 104. In other words, rejoice and be glad in the midst of suffering for righteousness and for Jesus, because that very suffering will receive a very great compensation and a very great reward. The greater the suffering your faith endures, the greater your appreciation of the reward you will receive in heaven. So rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in heaven!

PRAY FOR healing, protection, help, and comfort here and away

Hannah Huelsman—diagnosed with polycythemia, thickening of blood; and acid reflux
Mark Campbell—seizures and blood clots
Giles Free—seizure and black eye from fall; confined at home, no driving for 3 mos
Pat Wilkes—recovering from knee surgery; pain
Judy Sartin's son David—lost his cousin **Billy Hughes**, age 61, to hanging (suspicious circumstances) last week
Brittany Tope's grandmother—dialysis
Ed Fink—prostate cancer; current treatment for brain tumors. Undergoing chemo this month.
Judy Sartin's friends—Vicky Keyes, mastectomy 9/8; **Summer Jensen**, multiple tumors, cysts on both kidneys

Andrea Arvola, Justin Hambrick, and Gary Boyd—spiritual strength

CHRONIC CONDITIONS

Logan Corray; Addison Tope; Christian Harrod; Rocco Jr; Pat Wilkes—asthma
Bill Dennis—heart issues
Autumn Hadders—epilepsy; celiac disease
Danielle Huelsman—vertigo, CV syndrome
Kirk Johnson—MS
Menards—aging; **Lloyd**, diabetes, weak; **Virginia**, macular degeneration; high BP
Sandra Perry—neuropathy from diabetes
Cheryl Reames—diverticulitis; fibromyalgia
Nell Free—pacemaker, heart; back pain
Judy Sartin—spinal stenosis; arthritis
Judy and Mike Strand—hepatitis treatment
Lynda Szymanski—COPD, lung weakness

Job concerns Linda Szymanski

Travel **Mina Gonzalez** is in WI helping with new grandson Asher, back 9/14. The **Finks** are in Grand Junction visiting their daughter.

Keeping Our Hearts in Heaven. We must not miss one of the clear implications of this text. Jesus wills for His disciples to desire the reward of heaven more than we desire the reward of the world. Jesus wills for us to have our treasure in heaven not on earth, Mt 6:19–20. Jesus wills for your heart to be so set on heaven that to leave this earth is a cause of rejoicing. Not without tears!—as Paul said, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," and as Jesus sweat blood in Gethsemane in the face of his own pain, but for the joy set before Him endured the cross, Heb 12:2.

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Blessed Are You When You Are Persecuted, from p. 3

Jesus wills for us to have our hearts primarily in heaven, our hopes primarily in heaven, our longings primarily in heaven, our joy primarily in heaven. There is no other way that we can rejoice and be glad at the loss of our earthly joys. How shall we rejoice and be glad when these things are taken from us if we have not loved heaven more?

Consider the Prophets of Old. So what shall we do? How shall we keep our hearts in heaven? Make a regular practice of your life to consider the prophets of old who were persecuted and killed for the cause of God and righteousness. Turn often to Heb 11:36-38 and read how by faith the faithful suffered mocking and scourging, chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword—of whom the world was not worthy! Go often to these great men and get inside their hearts. Put yourself on the rack with them and learn how to love heaven with them. Listen as they say, *"Abuse suffered for Christ is greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt, for we look to the reward,"* Heb 11:26.

Consider Those Who Have Given Their All for Christ. Read the testimonies of those who have given their all for Christ. The letter of John Hooper was written three weeks before he was burned at the stake in England in 1555: *"You must now turn all your [thoughts] from the peril you see, and mark the felicity that followeth the peril... Beware of beholding too much the felicity or misery of this world; for the consideration and too earnest love or fear of either of them draweth from God,"* Ryle, *Light from Old Times*, p. 115. Consider the children of John Rogers. He was burned alive the same year Hooper was. His children accompanied him to the place of execution and called out encouragements to him through their tears that he might be strong and not turn back and dishonor Christ, Ryle, p. 64. Consider Dietrich Bonhoeffer. As he left his prison room on the way to the gallows in 1945, he said to Payne Best, "This is the end—for me the beginning of life," Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography*, p. 830. Ten years later the camp doctor wrote, "At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God," Bethge, pp. 830–31. Or consider the last letter of Vanya Moiseyev, the 20 year old soldier in the Soviet Red army. He had been tortured for some time. On July 16, 1972, they went too far, and he died. On July 15 he wrote to his brother Vladimir, *"Don't tell our parents everything. Just tell them, 'Vanya wrote me a letter and writes that Jesus Christ is going into battle. This is a Christian battle, and he doesn't know whether he will be back,'"* M. Grant, *Vanya*, pp. 175f.

I desire that all of you, friends, remember this one verse. *"Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life,"* Rev 2:10. Look to the martyrs! Whatever you must do to get your heart in heaven and off the world, do it! Otherwise you will not be able to obey the command of our Lord, *"Rejoice and be glad in persecution, for great is your reward in heaven."* And let the battle cry of the church continue to be: *"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose,"* Jim Elliot, 20th Century martyr.

If someone should ask whether having our heart in heaven will make us useless on earth, the answer is given by Jesus in the very next paragraph of the Mount Sermon. People who have their hearts so much in heaven that they fear no man but rejoice in persecution—such radically free and joyful people are the *"salt of the earth"* and *"the light of the world!"*

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Preacher

Jim Reingrover (303) 973-5102

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Assembly Schedule

Sunday

Bible classes	9:00 am
Morning assembly	10:00 am
Afternoon assembly	1:30 pm

Wednesday

Bible classes	7:30 pm
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Sunday morning

• **adult Bible class**, *Lessons from Deuteronomy*, Larry Campbell

• **Sermon**, September **Making Decisions** series: "A Prescription for Making Bad Decisions," Jim Reingrover

Sunday afternoon

• **Sermon**, "The Fruit of the Spirit is... Goodness," Kenny Boyd

Wednesday night adult Bible class, *Pearls from Proverbs*, Jim Reingrover