

cause of God become more important than you own life" -- Allen, *God's Psychiatry*, p. 158.

5. **Remain firm for the right:** John 12:23, 27, 28; 17:5; Hebrews 12:2.
 - a. Stay in the struggle for right, in the stream of life.
 - b. Keep on going: Never give up! Right will prevail! (1 Corinithian 10:13).
6. **Remember** that it is better to suffer for well-doing than be praised or to suffer for evil doing (1 Peter 2:20-25; 3:17, 18; 4:14-16). Boyce, *Power to Become*, p. 43-46.

V. BLESSINGS DERIVED FROM PERSECUTION

- A. **Strength.** Though being a Christian costs, it is the pathway to growth in compassion, steadfastness, approvedness and hope (Romans 5:1-5).
 1. Although the trial or testing of faith is seldom pleasant from the human viewpoint, the proving of faith works patience, and it develops and reveals stronger, Christian character which includes greater trust in God and dependence upon Him (James 1:2-4).
 2. That is how we learn and grow in the grace that is in Christ (Luke 21:12,13; 2 Timothy 2:1; 2 Peter 3:1-18).
- B. **Purity: refining power** (1 Peter 1:6-9). "*When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold*" (Job 23:10-12).
- C. **Opportunities increase:** Larger usefulness. Opportunities to glorify God and exalt Christ increase (Philippians 1:12; Acts 8:4; 1 Peter 3:16).
- D. **Concern of Christ and angels:** Matthew 5:10-12; Hebrews 1:14.
- E. **Final blessings: Crown, eternal life: A great reward in proportion to, yet much greater than, the sacrifice** (2 Timothy 4:6-8; Matthew 5:12; Cf. Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17,18). Yet this promise is not to him who avoids, despises or merely observes the contest, whining "they criticize me," etc., etc., when the going gets tough, the sun is hot, or the battle is crucial.

VI. TO PARTAKE OF CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS HERE IS TO SHARE HIS GLORY WHEN HE COMES (1 Peter 4:12, 13; Romans 8:17,18).

VII. WE ARE "MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM" BECAUSE "ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM THAT LOVE GOD, EVEN TO THEM THAT ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE" (Romans 8:28, 33-39).

--Charles E. Crouch

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT -- LESSON EIGHT

"Blessed Are The Persecuted"

Matthew 5:10-12

INTRODUCTION —

- I. Society has always persecuted its best and prosecuted its worst citizens, for refusing to conform to the middle of the road.
- II. There is unceasing conflict between good and evil, right and wrong, truth and error raging on earth, and frequently in our hearts.
- III. The eighth beatitude reminds us that being a Christian in the sinful world will inevitably cost and bring tribulation (John 16:33).

DISCUSSION —

I. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE REPROACHED AND/OR PERSECUTED.

- A. **Reproach** means a cause or occasion of blame, discredit or disgrace; the act or action of reproaching or disgracing; an expression of rebuke or disapproval. To reproach another person means to speak abusively, to censure, rebuke revile or upbraid. It **may** include false statements invented and told because of prejudice and/or malice which led those who invent them that nothing is too evil to believe/tell against the object of their malice.
- B. To **persecute** means "to harass in a manner designed to injure, grieve, or afflict; specif: To cause to suffer because of belief. To annoy with persistent or urgent approaches (as attacks, pleas, or importunities): PESTER." --Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, p. 848.
 1. To persecute means to vex, or oppress; torment or torture.
 2. "The continued infliction of unjust pain or punishment; especially, a period of ill treatment and opposition on account of religious beliefs; the state of being unjustly treated, repeated repeated injury of any kind"-- F.L. Cox, *Sermon Notes on the Sermon on the Mount*, 1955, p. 31.

II. WHAT ARE ITS CAUSES?

- A. **Intolerance and prejudice.** The righteous person is different and has no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. (Ephesians 5:11); hence, this causes a feeling of resentment in the heart of the wicked (John 15:19).

- B. **Pride.** A Christian, by his very manner of life, is a constant rebuke to sinners (Hebrews 11:7b). Some of them he wins; some he offends. "He makes the worthless and self-centered uncomfortable." "Pride wounded writhes in pain:" Herod and John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1ff; Mark 6:24-28). Elijah and the widow: "Are you come to call my sin to my remembrance?" (I Kings 17:18).
- C. **Envy or Jealousy.** Sinners as a rule do not rejoice when godly people in the same line are favored above them (Genesis 4:1-9).
- D. **Selfishness.** The genuine, vital Christian must often work *for* that which works *against* the profits of vested interests (Acts 16:16-23; 19:23ff; John 2:13-17).
- E. **The very aggressiveness of a Christian in carrying out God's will** (John 14:6; Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:12).
 - 1. Living goodness provokes opposition by those unlike Jesus--the ungodly, sensuous, profane; etc. Christianity is a warfare (2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:12; 1 Timothy 6:12).
 - 2. Jesus said, He who loves darkness hates the light which exposes his evil works (John 3:19-21; Luke 6:22-26: "*Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!*")
 - 3. Although persecution is inevitable to him who is determined to live a Christian life (2 Timothy 3:12), this does not mean that all people universally will hate or harm the Christian (2 Corinthians 4:2; 1 Peter 2:11,12; Acts 2:47).

III. IN WHAT FORMS DOES PERSECUTION COME?

- A. Material or physical loss or injury: **By hand, fist, sword or flame.**
 - 1. Jesus; Stephen; Paul; *Fox's Book of Martyrs*; etc.
 - 2. See also Hebrews 11:34.
- B. **By tongue or pen:** Verbal or written abuse or reproach.
 - 1. Most persecution in our land has shifted from scaffold, stake and whipping post to classroom, gym, office and shop (Matthew 5:11).
 - 2. It may come in the form of ridicule, slander, derision, scoffing, sport/rejection (Luke 6:22).
 - 3. Jesus was accused of being a friend of publicans and sinners, a glutton, winebibber, mad, in league with Satan, etc., **to discredit and destroy his influence and name** (John 15:18,19).
- C. See *20th Century Christian*, 8/67, p. 33, Paden; McCord, *Happiness Guaranteed*, p.58.

IV. HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND? WHAT IS THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD PERSECUTION?

- A. We must avoid unchristian response, such as whining/self-pity.

- 1. Do not yield to the temptation to complain, to whine, to succumb to self-pity. Decide to win, not lose. Becoming full of self pity instead of faith in Christ guarantees defeat and loss (Colossians 1:27).
- 2. There is great danger in allowing a persecution complex to develop: This allows one's misfortunes to become the champion of his life, rather than his faith in the Lord and worthy achievement through Jesus Christ our Lord to be the champion (Romans 8:37).
- 3. Do not yield to the temptation to take vengeance (Romans 12:17-19).
- 4. Do not become so discouraged that you give up the fight for right, saying, "What's the use?" (Mark 4:16,17; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

- B. We must adopt and follow the Christian response and attitude.
 - 1. **"Arm ye yourselves:"** *"Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourself also with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that ye should no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God"* (1 Peter 4:1,2).
 - 2. **Bless/pray** for your persecutors: Do not curse, censure, revile, slander or speak evil against your tormentors (Romans 12:14; Matthew 5:43-45).
 - 3. **"Rejoice and be exceeding glad:"** *"Leap for joy;" "Let me congratulate you;" "Be of good cheer;"* for two reasons.
 - a. A big reward awaits you: *"Great is your reward in heaven"* compare Revelation 3:21.
 - b. You are in wonderful company: *"For so persecuted the prophets that were before you."* You are now in the company of Abel, Isaiah, Daniel, Stephen, Jesus, the apostles, and a multitude of other righteous souls.
 - 4. **Bear patiently:** Return good for evil (1 Peter 2:21-24; Romans 12:21).
 - a. Be fearless, settled and strong in the Lord: Follow Jesus, Paul and others like them (1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:13; 11:1).
 - b. *"Wait for Jehovah: Be strong, and let thy heart take courage; Yea, wait thou for Jehovah"* (Psalm 27:14; Isaiah 40:31; 41:9-11). "The tide will come in:" "No person ever really lives until he has found something worth dying for. You can never really possess the Kingdom of God until the