

Level 3 Lesson 5

PERSECUTION

By Don Krow

Today we're going to look at the subject of persecution and the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:16-23. He wanted to prepare His disciples for opposition; He wanted them to know opposition was going to come. All those who live godly, Christ-centered lives will suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). It's not something you can rebuke. The enemy may be behind it, but persecution is part of standing for righteousness. The Bible says those who live godly in Christ will suffer persecution. Jesus is preparing His disciples by saying, "*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.*" (Matt. 10:16). The word "behold" is saying, "Listen to Me, guys. I want you to get this. I'm going to send you as sheep in the midst of wolves." Sheep are the most defenseless, dependent animals I know of. A sheep doesn't have fangs, doesn't have venom like a snake—it has no defense whatsoever. The only defense it really has is the shepherd.

A shepherd's responsibility is to keep wolves out of the flock of sheep, but Jesus is saying the very opposite: "I'm sending you out as sheep into a pack of wolves." Isn't that amazing? The reason He is saying it is that He's preparing them for opposition. Ephesians 6:12 says, "*For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*" There will be opposition. Part of the Christian life is opposition, and Jesus wants you to know that. He wants to prepare you for that by saying, "*Be ye therefore wise as serpents*" (Matt. 10:16). That word "wise" means in every situation, you will not needlessly incite problems but will have wisdom that you carry with you. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

He then says, "*But beware of men*" (Matt. 10:17). The enemy is going to use men. Ephesians 2:2 says that there is "*the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*" Satan is going to use men to oppose us, to oppose the purposes of Jesus Christ, and to oppose the Word of God. "*Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues*" (Matt. 10:17). Paul said, "*Five times I was scourged, five times I was beaten with thirty-nine lashes, because of Jesus Christ, and the message of Jesus Christ, and the message of the gospel*" (2 Cor. 11:23-24). Jesus said you will be brought before governors—even the government will sometimes be used to oppose the purposes of Jesus Christ. You'll be brought before governors and kings for Jesus' sake, for a testimony to them or against them.

I'm a teacher at Charis Bible College. I was teaching a course on evangelism, and I was showing the students how they could use an evangelism letter and personal testimony to reach out to the lost. I did one myself and sent it out to fifty to a hundred people. Just a couple of days after that, I got a phone call from a woman in town named Mary Anne. She said, "You're not going to get away with it; you can't tell me about Jesus Christ; you can't get away with this. Where did you get my name, anyway?" I said,

“Well, I got it right out of the phone book.” She said, “You’re a liar! My name and address are not in the phone book!” I said, “Well, that’s where I got it.” She said, “Tomorrow the police will contact you.” I thought to myself, *Is the Bible really true?* And the police did contact me the next day and they spent about two hours trying to interrogate me.

Do you see what I’m saying? When there are criminals out on the street, the police wasted two hours of their time. Why? For the sake of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the Gospel. Is the Word of God really true? If you stand on the Word of God, if you’re bold to witness, if you’re bold to proclaim Jesus, if you’re bold to live a righteous life before men, there will be opposition. There are forces of evil, there are forces of good. Jesus wanted His disciples to be prepared.

Jesus said in Matthew 10:19, “*But when they deliver you up, take no thought [be not anxious] how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak*” (brackets mine). With God’s Spirit, you’ll have wisdom like Stephen of old. The people couldn’t handle the wisdom by which he spoke. Jesus says in verses 22-23, “*And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.*” Opposition against righteousness, against the purposes of Jesus Christ, is a reality if you’re a doer of the Word and not just a hearer.

I was in a park a while back, and I saw an elderly lady sitting in the swing. I thought to myself, *She’s harmless; she can’t hurt me!* I asked her if I could sit down in the swing with her, and I sat down and began a conversation with her. I found out her name was Jane, and I said, “By the way, Jane, what do you do?” She said, “Oh, I’m an old lady; I don’t work anymore. I’m retired.” Then she said, “And, by the way, what do you do?” I said, “I work for a parachurch ministry, a parachurch organization.” Suddenly her countenance changed. She said, “Don’t you tell me about God! Don’t you tell me about Jesus!” I said “Oh, Jane, you shouldn’t talk that way,” and she said, “If Jesus Christ was in front of me, I would spit in His face!” I said, “Jane! You shouldn’t say things like that! You must have had a lot of people hurt you in churches for you to talk like that. Jane, you shouldn’t talk like that! Let me tell you about my family.” She said, “No! I said you can’t talk to me. You’re going to tell me about Jesus Christ and what God did in your family, and I’m not going to let you. You cannot speak.” I said, “Jane, please. I’ve got to tell you about Jesus.” She said, “No! I’m telling you to SHUT UP!”

She had a little dog on a leash, and she just pulled that little dog until he was sitting there going “Arrgh,” and away she went. Here was a woman out of control because a spirit rose up in her, the spirit of disobedience. She was controlled by the enemy. I thought to myself, *I’m not used to having people yell at me. I’m not used to people getting in my face.* But I had nothing but compassion, nothing but love for Jane. She was out of control, and I was totally in control. I went home and said, “Lord, You know what? The greatest miracle is that I was in control. When someone was in my face, I had nothing but love and compassion.”

Persecution and opposition will come when we go out in the name of Jesus. The same Spirit of God that gives boldness to proclaim Jesus even when we're rejected for His sake, that same Spirit will give us comfort and strength in any situation.

Discipleship Questions

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Those who live a godly life will experience what?

2. How would you define "persecution"?

3. Read Mark 4:16-17. Affliction and persecution come for what reason?

4. Read Acts 8:1, 4. The persecution in Jerusalem resulted in what?

5. Read Matthew 5:10-12. There is a blessing upon those who are persecuted for

6. Read Matthew 5:12. When believers are persecuted for righteousness' sake, what can they expect in the future? _____

7. Read Acts 9:4-5. Who was Saul persecuting? _____

8. Read Acts 9:1. In reality, who was Saul persecuting?

9. Read Galatians 6:12. The Judaizers in the book of the Galatians tried to add the keeping of religious Law to the Gospel. In so doing, they avoided what?

Scriptures to Use with Questions

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

Mark 4:16-17 – *“[16] And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; [17] And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended.”*

Acts 8:1, 4 – *“[1] And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered*

abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. [4] Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”

Matthew 5:10-12 – “[10] Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. [12] Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Matthew 5:12 – “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Acts 9:4-5 – “[4] And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [5] And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

Acts 9:1 – “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest.”

Galatians 6:12 – “As many as desire to make a fair show in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.”

Answer Key

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Those who live a godly life will experience what? **Persecution.**
2. How would you define “persecution”? **To harass; to cause to suffer because of belief.**
3. Read Mark 4:16-17. Affliction and persecution come for what reason? **For the Word’s sake; i.e., to take away the Word.**
4. Read Acts 8:1, 4. The persecution in Jerusalem resulted in what? **People going everywhere preaching the Word.**
5. Read Matthew 5:10-12. There is a blessing upon those who are persecuted for **righteousness’ sake.**
6. Read Matthew 5:12. When believers are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, what can they expect in the future? **A great reward in heaven.**
7. Read Acts 9:4-5. Who was Saul persecuting? **Jesus.**
8. Read Acts 9:1. In reality, who was Saul persecuting? **The disciples (Christians) of the Lord.**

9. Read Galatians 6:12. The Judaizers in the book of the Galatians tried to add the keeping of religious Law to the Gospel. In so doing, they avoided what? **Suffering persecution for the cross of Christ. In other words, they avoided the persecution that came from preaching that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone.**

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