

# ***A persecution posture***

***Matthew 5:10-12***

## **Review**

**The Messiah defines the true nature of Kingdom life: The Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29)**

**a. The character of Kingdom people (5:1-12)**

**1. Attitude toward self: hunger for holiness (5:1-6)**

**2. Attitude toward others: passion for peace (5:7-9)**

**3. Attitude toward enemies: posture for persecution (5:10-12)**

“<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

## **A. Related texts**

**Luke 6** “<sup>22</sup> Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. <sup>23</sup> Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.”

- Social exclusion and misunderstanding are a common theme in persecution texts.
- Our joy is not to come from the pain of persecution but in the midst of it as we contemplate our future.

**John 15** “<sup>18</sup> If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

- Jesus expected that our lives should reflect his life to the extent that we experience the same kind of persecution that he received.
- It is suggested that the only way to avoid persecution is to accommodate to the world’s values and agenda.

**2 Timothy 3:12** “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,”

- It is not just the living but the “wanting to live” a godly life that brings persecution.

**Luke 6:26** “Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.”

- Jesus expects us to be very concerned when we become popular with the world.
- Only a false prophet can expect good treatment in the world.

**1 Peter 3** “<sup>13</sup> And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. *And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,* <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”

- We should expect that good deeds in the midst of hardship will often bring opportunity to share of our hope in Christ.
- It is also expected that what Christians view as good the world may view as evil.

**1 Peter 4** “<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; <sup>13</sup> but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. <sup>15</sup> By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; <sup>16</sup> but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God.”

- Persecution is to be expected as a part of sharing the suffering of Christ.
- It is possible to be persecuted for doing evil things or for being unloving to those around us.

**James 1** “<sup>2</sup> Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

- Trials of faith will come in many different ways – “natural” calamity, persecution, consequences of living in a fallen world, etc.
- Faith in the midst of trials not only gives opportunities to demonstrate faith but also to develop it.

**Matthew 5** “<sup>38</sup> You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.”

- Jesus was specific in forbidding retaliation for persecution.
- I Peter 2:11-4:22 makes the same point

- B. The nature of persecution in these texts tells us a lot about the emphasis in Jesus' teaching.**
- 1. The language used suggests something other than physical persecution:** “insult”, “speak evil of”, “exclude”, “reject as evil.”
  - 2. The reason given suggests that it is possible to suffer for other reasons:** “righteousness”, “My name”, “doing good”, “because of Me.”
  - 3. The response expected is more passive than retaliatory, more joy than sorrow:** “blessed”, “rejoice”, “fearless”, “good conscience”, ready to give an account of hope.”

- C. Three tragic assumptions made by many American Evangelical Christians as they try to understand their role in society.**
- **America was founded as an Evangelical Christian nation.** (There is an informal union of Uncle Sam and Jesus Christ.) For more information go to [apttoteach.org](http://apttoteach.org) theology file #807, #808
  - **God's Kingdom is to find its chief expression in a spiritually renewed America.** (We are to find, create, and maintain a place on this earth where followers of Christ will not be persecuted.)
  - **Cultural persecution is a violation of our God given rights as Americans.** (When we are persecuted we get hostile and declare war on our culture.)

- D. Are we standing for and against anything that brings persecution? For what are we willing to sacrifice?** The unspoken goals of too many Christians suggest that they are not living in the Kingdom of God.
- 1. They seek to let the modern world set the agenda of their style, message and values.**  
“<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who have **fit into the world around them**, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
  - 2. They expect to have good things said about them, and to be respected by their culture.**  
“<sup>11</sup> Blessed are you when men **praise** you, and **honor** you, and **say all kinds of good things about you**, on account of Me.”
  - 3. They expect to prosper in this life and thus demonstrate that following God leads to the good life.**  
“<sup>12</sup> Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward **in this life** is great, for so they **rewarded the favored of God** who were before you.”
  - 4. The church at Corinth seemed to have this misguided understanding of what it meant to be a participant in the Kingdom of God.**  
**I Cor.4** “<sup>6</sup> Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you might learn not to exceed what is

written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. <sup>7</sup> For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? <sup>8</sup> You are already filled, you have already become rich, you have become kings without us; and {I} would indeed that you had become kings so that we also might reign with you. <sup>9</sup> For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. <sup>10</sup> We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. <sup>11</sup> To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; <sup>12</sup> and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup> when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, {even} until now."

**E. Are we persecuted for valid reasons? What makes us an offense - God's Spirit or our style? Never suffer persecution for:**

1. **Fighting over the wrong issues** – An example might be the denying of basic civil rights to homosexuals. It is the granting of "special" rights (as a designated minority) to homosexuals that is the real issue that puts homosexual acts in the category of publicly affirmed behavior.
2. **Failing to listen to others and understand the issues** – Too often, the complexity of social issues like capital punishment, abortion, evolution, etc. is ignored.
3. **Triumphalism** – punctuating all statements with exclamation marks. See [apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) (theology file #217)
4. **Irrationalism** – An example might be the linking prayer in school to student performance.
5. **Hypocrisy** – It is easy to define worldliness in a narrow sense – use of alcohol, gambling, etc. while ignoring, nationalism, racism, materialism, etc.
6. **Personal attacks** – This avoids the real issues.

**F. Are we persevering well? Are we angry, cynical, and sad or rejoicing and blessed?**

**G. How do I know when to resist evil or correct a situation where I, or others, are persecuted?**

1. We must first ask what is our first impulse in responding to persecution? Are we seeking peace and rejoicing or are we trying to get even or demand justice?

2. What model are we giving to those around us? Are we helping others follow the teaching of Jesus or are we encouraging them to fight for their rights?
3. What are our true motives? Are we serving God or self? Are we acting like Jesus or are we acting like everyone else in the world?