



**Forgiving Those
Who Persecute
You**

A Teaching Outline

Compiled By Dr. Harold Bollinger

How to Respond to Persecution

Sometimes we can relate to those who have gone before us as a testimony of faith and endurance. We can also learn from their teaching and admonishment as to how we should respond to persecution

**Regarding persecution, the Bible says we should
Put our trust in the LORD and do not be ashamed.**

Psalms 31:1

In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust; let me never be ashamed: deliver me in thy righteousness.

David called on the Lord to deliver him. He wanted God to stop those who were unjustly causing trouble. Therefore, David made his request based upon what he knew of God's name, or character. Because God is righteous and loving, he desires to deliver his people.

Follow the leading of the Lord

Psalm 31:3

For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

We say we have faith in God, but do we really trust him? David's words, "I entrust my spirit into your hand," convey his complete trust in God. Jesus used this phrase as he was dying on the cross—showing his absolute dependence on God the Father (Luke 23:46).

Be of good courage

Psalms 31:24

Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

In describing his feelings, David wrote of the helplessness and hopelessness everyone feels when hated or rejected. But adversity is easier to accept when we recognize our true relationship with the sovereign God (31:14-18). Although our enemies may seem to have the upper hand, they are ultimately the helpless and hopeless ones. Those who know God will be victorious in the end (31:23). We can have courage today because God will preserve us.

Turn the other cheek

Matthew 5:39

But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Any Messiah who would turn the other cheek was not the military leader they wanted to lead a revolt against Rome. Since they were under Roman oppression, they wanted retaliation against their enemies, whom they hated. But Jesus suggested a new, radical response to injustice: Instead of demanding rights, give them up freely! According to Jesus, it is more important to *give* justice and mercy than to receive it.

Go the extra mile

Matthew 5:41

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

By telling us not to retaliate, Jesus keeps us from taking the law into our own hands. By loving and praying for our enemies, we can overcome evil with good.

Those who suffer with him will be glorified with him.

Romans 8:17

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

We are no longer like "fearful slaves"; instead, we are the Master's children. What a privilege! Because we are God's children, we share in great treasures as co-heirs. God has already given us his best gifts: his Son, his Holy Spirit, forgiveness, and eternal life; and he encourages us to ask him for whatever we need.

There is a price for being identified with Jesus. Along with being "heirs of God's glory," Paul also mentions the suffering that Christians must face. What kinds of suffering are we to endure? For first-century believers, there was economic and social persecution, and some even faced death. We, too, must pay a price for following Jesus.

In many parts of today's world, Christians face pressures just as severe as those faced by Christ's first followers. Even in countries where Christianity is tolerated or encouraged, Christians must not become complacent. To live as Jesus did—serving others, giving up one's rights, resisting pressures to conform to the world—always exacts a price. Nothing we suffer, however, can compare to the great price that Jesus paid to save us.

Love without dissimulation

Romans 12:9

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Most of us have learned how to be courteous to others—how to speak kindly, avoid hurting their feelings, and appear to take an interest in them.

We may even be skilled in pretending to show compassion when we hear of others' needs, or to become indignant when we learn of injustice.

But God calls us to real and genuine love that goes far beyond being hypocritical and polite.

Genuine love requires concentration and effort. It means helping others become better people. It demands our time, money, and personal involvement. No individual has the capacity to express love to a whole community, but the body of Christ in your town does. Look for people who need your love, and look for ways you and your fellow believers can love your community for Christ.

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Bless them which persecute you

Romans 12:14

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Many people use their contacts and relationships for selfish ambition. They select those people who will help them climb the social ladder. Christ demonstrated and taught that we should treat all people with respect—those of a different race, the handicapped, the poor, young and old, male and female.

We must never consider others as being beneath us. Paul says we need to live in harmony with others and not be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people.

Answer the Hope that is with you with meekness and fear.

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Some Christians believe that faith is a personal matter that should be kept to oneself. It is true that we shouldn't be boisterous or obnoxious in sharing our faith, but we should always be ready to give an answer, gently and respectfully, when asked about our faith, our lifestyle, or our Christian perspective. Can others see your hope in Christ? Are you prepared to tell them what Christ has done in your life?

When Christ's glory is revealed you will have great joy.

1 Peter 4:13

But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Many people in the early church had concerns about life after death. In Thessalonica, Christians worried that loved ones who died before Christ's return might never see Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Peter's readers needed to be reminded that the dead (both the faithful and their oppressors) would be judged. The judgment will be perfectly fair, he pointed out, because even the dead have heard the Good News (see also 3:18, 19).

The Good News was first announced when Jesus Christ preached on the earth, but it has been operating since before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and it affects all people, the dead as well as the living.

Peter brings to mind Jesus' words: "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers" (Matthew 5:11).

Christ will send his Spirit to strengthen those who are persecuted for their faith. Peter creates no illusions; God's plan for your life may include pain and hardship. When trouble comes, don't be surprised.

This does not mean that all suffering is the result of good Christian conduct. Peter says to distinguish between suffering for being a believer and suffering for doing wrong things. For example, a Christian may think he is being picked on for his faith when it is obvious to everyone else that his own unpleasant behavior is the cause of his problems. It may take careful thought or wise counsel to determine the real cause of our suffering. We can be assured, however, that whenever we suffer because of our loyalty to Christ, he will be with us all the way.

It is not shameful to suffer for being a Christian. When Peter and John were persecuted for preaching the Good News, they rejoiced because such persecution was a mark of God's approval of their work (Acts 5:41). Don't seek out suffering, and don't try to avoid it. Instead, keep on doing what is right whether or not it brings suffering.

Examples of Prayers for the Persecutors

Jesus prayed for his persecutors perhaps one of His most famous prayers was uttered when he faced certain death, even the death on the cross:

Luke 23:34

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do and they parted his raiment, and cast lots

Jesus asked God to forgive the people who were putting him to death—Jewish leaders, Roman politicians and soldiers, bystanders—and God answered that prayer by opening up the way of salvation even to Jesus' murderers. Jesus was suffering the most horrible, painful death ever devised by sinful man, and he looked at the people responsible for his suffering and prayed for their forgiveness.

The Roman officer and soldiers who witnessed the Crucifixion said, "This man truly was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). Soon many priests were converted to the Christian faith (Acts 6:7). Because we are all sinners, we all played a part in putting Jesus to death. The good news is that God is gracious. He will forgive us and give us new life through his Son.

Roman soldiers customarily divided up the clothing of executed criminals among themselves. When they gambled for Jesus' clothes, they fulfilled the prophecy in Psalm 22:18.

Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus, was no stranger to persecution, mostly because before his conversion he was the lead persecutor.

Saul was the “young man” at whom the witnesses threw their clothes; a sign of respect for the leader after conversion and throughout Paul’s missionary travels he asked that the Churches pray for him, that he might overcome his own persecutors.

Paul seeks prayer for his persecution.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-2

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

Stephen faced persecution and death.

Acts 7:55

But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,

Luke 22:69). Stephen's vision supported Jesus' claim and angered the Jewish leaders who had condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy. They would not tolerate Stephen's words, so they dragged him out and killed him. People may not kill us for witnessing about Christ, but they may let us know they don't want to hear the truth and try to silence us. Keep honoring God in your conduct and words; though many may turn against you and your message, some will follow Christ.

Remember, Stephen's death had a profound impact on Paul, who later became the world's greatest missionary. Even those who oppose you now may later turn to Christ. Stephen saw the glory of God and Jesus, the Messiah, standing at God's right hand. Stephen's words are similar to Jesus' words spoken before the high council Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62;

Is Christian America praying for those suffering persecution around the world?

Prayer for Persecuted Christians

Heavenly Father, I pray in Jesus name. Many are suffering persecution and risking their lives because of their love for you and their Christian faith.

I pray for their safety and sanctuary. I pray that you will give them grace and a spirit of forgiveness.

I pray for their persecutors and that violence will cease and that they will come into a knowledge of Christ.

I pray all of this in the name of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ who shed his life's blood for our sins and safety. Amen

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print