

Series: Great Questions – week 12

CDOBC – beginning on 10/18/09

Title: “Persecution?”

Acts 9:1-6 & selected passages ~ January 31, 2010

OBJECTIVE: To help us understand persecutions true object, and how to be joyful when we are persecuted.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- Thanks to all who helped with Walk Thru the N.T.
- Quarterly Business meeting – Jan. 31st after 2nd service – 2009 financial report – new Deacons Please sign up today for the Youth Fundraiser Hot Dog Lunch in the courtyard between services (lunch is next Sunday after the Quarterly Business Meeting raising money for the Latvia Missions Trip in July) - 2009 Finance Reports available (I need them from you to copy for Sunday☺)
- Haiti Relief update – \$3,562.00 given so far
- New / Updated CDOBC Picture Directory
- Do you want to say anything about the Service Planning Session—2:00 p.m. next Sunday the 31st?

Opening Prayer

The reality of persecution today.

Persecution has existed toward believers since Cain killed Abel for Abel’s belief and favor in God’s eyes.

Noah was ridiculed for believing what God said, Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, Moses was mocked and ridiculed by the people for leading them out of Egypt, David suffered as Saul desired to kill him, many of the prophets were laughed at and ignored as they spoke the Words of God. Today, one of the organizations that tracks, reports, and ministers to those affected by persecution is *Voice of the Martyrs*.

In Algeria, on January 10th, Muslim extremists set fire to a church in Tizi Ouzou, damaging the church property. A few days before setting fire to the church, the extremists broke into the church and stole valuable electronic equipment. A few weeks before that, they tried to prevent the Christians

there from holding a service by barring their entrance to the church.

In Nigeria, more than 100 Christians have been killed in Jos, Nigeria since January 17th. Various Christian church buildings have also been attacked, and the authorities have now imposed a curfew and brought in Nigerian troops to control the violence.

In Malaysia - Eight churches have been attacked in Malaysia following a court decision that allows Christians to use “Allah” in their prayers and publications when referring to God, according to The Associated Press (AP).

On Sunday, Jan. 10, three churches were firebombed...a Molotov cocktail was hurled at the All Saints Church...early in the morning before it opened...Police found burn marks on the wall but there was no damage to the building”. Despite the attacks, thousands of Christians attended services and prayed for unity and an end to the attacks.

The attacks on churches began on Jan. 8 and 9, when four churches were hit with firebombs. “No one was hurt and all suffered little damage, except the Metro Tabernacle Church,” AP said. “Parishioners there moved services after fire gutted the first floor.” (From VOM – Persecution.com)

Egyptian Father and daughter being persecuted for converting from Islam to Christianity -

“Dina is the daughter of 57-year-old Maher el-Gowhary, also known by his Christian name Peter Athanasius, who embraced Christianity secretly 35 years ago. Dina wrote a letter to President Obama asking him to intercede on their behalf.

In August, 2008 he filed the second ever lawsuit of a Muslim-born Egyptian against the Egyptian Government to

officially alter his identification documents to reflect his new Christian identity. He lost the case in June 2009.

“According to the Court ruling, the religious conversion of a Muslim is against Islamic Sharia law and poses a threat to the ‘Public Order’ in Egypt.”

He appealed the ruling and they have been “living in hiding” ever since he filed his lawsuit because Muslim clerics have called him an apostate and several Fatwa’s (religious edicts), for ‘spilling his blood’ have been issued. He frequently changes where he lives to evade being killed, and friends supply him with food.” (Source: <http://www.assistnews.net/Stories/2009/s09110097.htm>)

Tim Tebow

Focus on the Family has purchased time to air a commercial during this years Super Bowl, starring Tim Tebow and his mother, Pam. Paid for by the conservative Christian group Focus on the Family, the ad tells the story of Bob and Pam Tebow, who was pregnant with their fifth child when the couple travelled to the Philippines on a missionary trip. While there, Pam contracted amoebic dysentery and the medicines used for her recovery threatened her unborn fetus. Doctors advised her to abort the fetus. Pam ignored their advice and gave birth on Aug. 14, 1987, to a baby boy. That boy was Tim Tebow. (From <http://abcnews.go.com/WN/tim-tebow-super-bowl-ad-cbs-air-controversial/story?id=9667638>)

CBS is getting bombarded with criticism for airing the ad – and Tim Tebow is being criticized for not only holding his pro-life position, but specifically for sharing his beliefs.

I do not know where this is going...I can’t tell you that in the next few decades we will experience more intense and physical persecution here in the United States...I can’t tell

you we won't. Persecution in foreign lands has existed for centuries, but we have been sheltered from it by our laws and by the grace of God – but there is no guarantee that we will continue to live in a violence-free state forever. As believers, we need to be aware that persecution is not simply something we read about in the pages of Scripture – it's not simply something that happened in history – but it's a reality today – and it needs to be a concern in our heart as fellow believers suffer a great price for their faith.

Jesus promised we would be persecuted.

Let's clarify what we're talking about – let's try and define persecution more precisely.

Christian persecution is not:

- A. Anger towards us for being obnoxious human beings
- B. Disrespect toward us for being fanatical
- C. Opposition because we stand for a cause, political issue, etc.

So what is persecution? Are we experiencing persecution every time we face opposition in life? No. As stated above, we can face opposition for a variety of reasons – but Christian persecution is when we endure some sort of hardship because of Jesus. Persecution is, when as a result of our belief in Christ, we are belittled and we suffer some sort of disadvantage because of our faith. Persecution – because of the name of Christ, can be favoritism toward someone else, physical violence against us, vandalism of our property, and insulting, hateful and degrading language toward us.

Persecution should not surprise us. God never tries to bait and switch us to salvation – He is totally honest about what

we should expect when we claim Him as our Savior. Jesus said:

Luke 6:22-23

“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. ‘Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.’”

Mark 13:9-13a

“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me.”

The Apostle Paul clearly stated in **2 Timothy 3:12**

“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted...”

So – what do we learn from these verses?

First, don’t be *surprised* at persecution.

Be surprised and possibly concerned if you don’t experience persecution. Persecution is normal for the Christian – because the Christian embraces the truth of God – and the world hates the truth.

Some go so far as to say, *“If you are not being persecuted, then you are not living the Christian life.”*

I struggle with making such a dogmatic statement – I don't agree that being a Christian means that you are constantly persecuted. However, if you have never experienced persecution to one degree or another, then I think that is a red flag for your faith. Scripture is clear that believers will face persecution – so if you haven't faced it, then self-examination is appropriate!

Even a cursory look at church history will reveal that over the centuries, much persecution toward believers who stand for the truth of Christ comes from within the Church! The Reformers Hus, Wycliffe, Luther, and others are examples of this. When you stand for the truth of Christ, you will be persecuted for it.

Second, be *thankful* for persecution.

Now, Christianity is not masochistic, it doesn't love pain and suffering, but we should give thanks for persecution because it gives evidence that our faith is active – that our faith is visible to others.

Persecution is against Jesus, not us.

Turn to Acts 9:1-6 – Read passage

Question: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

One of the great questions in Scripture is Jesus' question here to Saul. Did Jesus know the answer? Yes. He is God and He knows everything – He is omniscient. So, why does he ask Saul (Paul) this question?

Answer: To convict Saul of his sin. “Saul, Saul” – in the Greek is emphatic – in other words, it's just like when you were little and from another room – your mom or dad yelled your name – your full name – not once, but twice! You didn't know what they were calling for – but you knew it wasn't a good thing. You knew the tone of voice – and you

knew that repeating your name was an urgent call and your full attention was required immediately!

The same applies here in our passage. Jesus is angry with Saul because he should know better. He has a tremendous knowledge of the truth – what the O.T. teaches about the Messiah – he had heard the testimony of Stephen – and then of many Christians as he would persecute them and drag them off to prison and vote for their death. “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” drove a stake through Saul’s heart – and his greatest fear was realized when he heard these words. Jesus’ question was not really a question in the usual sense, but an accusation. Saul answers with a question of his own – a question he no doubt knows the answer to also. Jesus clarifies any confusion there might have been – and clearly states that Paul was really persecuting him – not simply the people who claimed His name.

You see, when someone persecutes a Christian for their faith in Christ, they are not only causing pain and suffering in the person’s life, but they are really attacking Jesus himself. Jesus is the head of the church – the head of the body of Christ – each believer is a valuable part of the body – and just like our physical bodies, when my arm hurts, my head – my brain is directly involved in the trauma. When we suffer, Jesus suffers. This is in part what the author of Hebrews is referring to when he states that we have a merciful and sympathetic High Priest (Jesus – see 2:17 & 4:15).

Too often, we have a myopic view of any persecution we might face. We can easily fall into the selfish trap of thinking the persecution is aimed at us – when in reality, it’s aimed at Christ. Think about it – if you didn’t have Christ in your life – if you weren’t claiming His name for your salvation and His truth for your life, you wouldn’t be

enduring persecution! So, it truly is Christ who is being persecuted and you and I happen to be physical manifestation of Christ to the world.

Persecution is a blessing.

Matt. 5:10-12

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Acts 5:40-41 – Peter and the Apostles rejoice after persecution

“His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

1 Peter 4:14, 16

“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you...if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

There is nothing wrong if you are persecuted for your faith in Christ – in fact, rejoice, because everything is right in your life!

Application

Persecution will *strengthen* you.

James the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55) wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

James 1:2-4

No *matter* what, it’s *worth* it.

2 Cor. 4:17-18

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Romans 8:18

“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Close in prayer