

Suffering For Christ

By Ron Boatwright

One who is living a faithful Christian life will face opposition for his faith in various ways. Paul says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). The things we suffer are temporary while we live here on the earth, but we have a great eternal reward reserved in Heaven for us. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10-12).

The persecution we face today is not being crucified or stoned to death, but is verbal and being shunned. Jesus says, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven" (Luke 6:22-23). In today's world it is becoming less and less popular to be a Christian. Even some of the persecution will come from our own brethren, as it did in Paul's day (Galatians 2:4). "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but your part He is glorified" (1 Peter 4:14).

The reproach that we may endure for being a Christian glorifies our Lord. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter" (1 Peter 4:16). "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled" (1 Peter 3:14). There are a number of examples in the Bible of people being persecuted for righteousness sake and taking it patiently and even rejoicing. "And when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:40-41). Would we rejoice if we were beaten and threatened?

Peter says, "But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God" (1 Peter 2:20). When Christians in the first century were being persecuted, they went everywhere preaching and teaching the good news. Persecution didn't stop them. "At that time a great persecution

arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria....Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (Acts 8:1, 4). If we were persecuted like this today, would we stop being a Christian? If being a Christian were a crime today, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

We should count it a joy that we can suffer for the cause of Christ because we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him" (Romans 8:17).