



The Inevitability of Persecution

(REV24)

- 1) In Revelation, the Apostle John is writing from a context of suffering (**Revelation 1:9**), as did so many of the writers of Scripture: Moses, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Peter.
- 2) John, writing specifically to seven churches of Asia, sees himself as a “fellow partaker” in the almost universal persecution of true believers at that time.

“Partaker” translates the Greek word **συγκοινωνός**, which means to be a *participant* or *partner* with someone else. The word was used of *business partners* in the ancient world.¹

It is used in **Romans 11:17** of the Gentiles becoming partakers together with Israel in God’s blessing: “But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker (**συγκοινωνός**) with them of the rich root of the olive tree.”²

- 3) The word translated “persecution” is from a Greek word **διωγμός**, *to pursue*.

This means that persecution pursues you wherever you go, like Saul pursued David.

God’s people have often had to wander about and live in caves – not because they are not worthy of the world, but because the world is not worthy of them! (**Hebrews 11:38**)

¹ Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1979, on **συγκοινωνός**.

² All Scripture quotation from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977, unless otherwise noted.

4) Persecution is an inevitability for the godly believer:

a) Inevitabilities common to all men:

Death – In Adam all die, but in Christ all shall be made alive.

Taxes – the tribute money ordeal.

War – even to the last day there will be nations and kingdoms rising up against each other (**Matthew 24:6-7**).

b) Persecution and suffering are inevitabilities to all who are truly committed to Christ:

Philippians 1:29-30 - It has been given to us not only to believe but also to suffer.

2 Timothy 3:12 – “All who will live godly [not every Christian], will suffer persecution.”

Our increased identification with Jesus Christ brings on the inevitability of persecution.

John 12:1-10 – Lazarus, “who had been dead,” is seen eating at the table. Meanwhile, the Chief Priests are looking for him to kill him again! Jesus said that He would raise Lazarus so that they would see the glory of God. You also have come out of death into life.

Persecution comes because we have been used for God’s glory.

1 Timothy 4:10: “We suffer reproach because we serve the living God.”

c) There is a persecution that accompanies the believer who adheres to the finished work:

The writer of Hebrews wrote that after the Hebrew believers had received the revelation of the finality of the finished work, they suffered great persecution (**Hebrews 10:10, 32**).

The Devil will always challenge the light that we receive as believers.

- d) There is a persecution that accompanies our association with and loyalty to other men and woman of God who are under persecution.

Paul encouraged Timothy: “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.” (**2 Timothy 1:8**)

Timothy’s loyalty to God *and* Paul will be rewarded at the Bema Seat.

- e) Believers are often persecuted for the sake of God’s glory.

Paul said: “For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

When we exhibit the glory of God by manifesting Christ in our mortal bodies, persecution is inevitable.

1 Peter 4:14: “If you suffer for righteousness’ sake rejoice, because then the spirit of glory rests upon you.”

Glory is the sum total of God’s virtues.

- 5) Victory in persecution:

The key to becoming victorious in the midst of persecution is having *a response to the Word that is accompanied by concentration*, before, during and after the communication of it, rather than a mere superficial response.

Notice how John balances suffering (**Revelation 1:9**):

Notice that John referred to himself as a “brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance *which are* in Jesus.”

He mentioned three things with which he was a participant together with his brethren:

“Tribulation” – **θλίψις** is *a distress that is brought about by outward circumstances, a pressing, pressure, oppression, affliction, or tribulation.*³

“Kingdom” – **βασιλεία** means sovereignty, *kingship, royal power, royal rule, and kingdom.*⁴

Perseverance – **ὑπομονη** literally means to remain behind a thing, thus *patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance.*⁵

John, therefore, balanced off the pressure of persecution with an acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty and God’s provision of patience.

6) We are called to be sons of the light:

John 12:35-36: “Jesus therefore said to them, ‘For a little while longer the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, in order that you may become sons of light.’”

The Greek for “in order that you may become sons of light” is **ἵνα υἱοὶ φωτὸς γένησθε.**

γένησθε is the *aorist middle subjunctive* of **γίνομαι.**

γίνομαι indicates a *process*, i.e., *becoming* something.

³ Bauer, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, on **θλίψις.**

⁴ Bauer, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, on **βασιλεία.**

⁵ Bauer, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, on **ὑπομονη.**

In the middle voice, the subject participates in the action of the verb. In other words, we “walk in the light” and Christ makes us “sons of the light.”

The *subjunctive* mood is the mood of potential.

The “sons of light” is equivalent to “enlightened men”; Jesus called his disciples the light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**).⁶

The believer with the Word dwelling richly in his soul with all wisdom (**Colossians 3:16**) becomes *phosphorescent* – the Light of Christ’s life radiates from his or her own soul.

7) Principles: The divine perspective on Christian suffering:

Jesus’ perspective:

Jesus took persecution as a fact of life and as an *incidental* thing. Believers should follow His example.

When the word *incidental* is used as an adjective it means minor, casual, subordinate in significance or nature.

Occurring as a chance *concomitant*, that is, *an event or situation that happens at the same time as or in connection with another*.

If we take persecution as more than just an incidental thing we will begin to marvel at it.

1 John 3:13: “Do not marvel, brethren, if the world hates you.”

“Marvel” is the present active imperative of **θαυμάζω** – to *wonder, marvel, be astonished*.

The imperative mood indicates a command. John is saying, “*You must not be astonished, brethren, if the world hates you.*”

⁶ Robertson, Archibald Thomas, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, Tennessee, USA: Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1933), on John 12:36.

Don't get so overexcited about the world's hatred that it causes you to pull back from a thorough commitment to Christ and the profession of your faith.

Without an adequate root system in the Word, the believer is left unprotected.

Matthew 13:20 – The person who hears the Word impulsively falls away with equal impulsiveness when the persecution comes. The lack of a stable root system in the soul results in the inability to withstand inevitable persecution. This was a hearer who *appreciated*, but didn't *appropriate* the Word of God.

We shouldn't doubt in the darkness what God has shown us in the light.

There are eternal rewards for those who suffer for righteousness' sake:

Matthew 5:11-12: “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. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

We should see persecution as a privilege.

Jesus said, when it happens, we should kick up our heels and rejoice!

The fact that we are being persecuted here means that we are very popular in another sphere!

Mark 10:28-30: “Peter began to say to Him, “Behold, we have left everything and followed You.” Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to

come, eternal life. But many *who are* first, will be last; and the last, first.””

Jesus told Peter that the compensations of discipleship far outweigh the cost.

Paul’s perspective:

2 Corinthians 4:7-18:

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves; *we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”

“So death works in us, but life in you. But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore also we speak; knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things *are* for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

“Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

Romans 8:16-18:

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

The perspective of the writer of Hebrews: “Consider Him!”

Hebrews 3:1: “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider [κατανοέω] Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.”

We are to give intense consideration to Jesus Christ who held the shame of the cross in total contempt.

We are also to consider one another with this same intensity to stimulate and provoke to love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:23-24: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider [κατανοέω] how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.”

Hebrews 12:2-3: “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider [ἀναλογίζομαι] Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

Jesus belittled the nakedness and saw it as an incidental thing as compared to achieving His ultimate objectives:

To prove that He loves His Father. **John 14:29-31:** “And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it comes to

pass, you may believe. I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; *but that the world may know that I love the Father,*⁷ and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go from here.”

To prove that He loves us.

John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

John 10:11: “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

8) The power of our response:

Philippians 1:27-30: “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign [**ἔνδειξις** – an *omen* or *manifest token*] of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.”

If we have a firm root system in the truth it will serve as an **ἔνδειξις**, a *manifest token* or *evident token* [literally, *an omen*] to our persecutors of two other inevitabilities:

Our eternal life.

Their eternal destruction.

⁷ Italics mine.

Seeing He who is invisible by faith:

Moses was able to endure the reproach of men because He was able to see Him who is invisible.

The only way to see Jesus today is *through His Word*.

But the reproach that comes with identifying with God and His people is greater than all the riches of the world.

Hebrews 11:24-27: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking [ἀποβλέπω] to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.”

The word translated “looking” is the Greek word ἀποβλέπω, which means *to look away from all else toward an object*.

Moses *looked away from all else* and *looked to* Christ’s reward.

He saw the wrath and persecution of the king as merely incidental.

Persecution is sent to intensify our commitment to and dependence upon our Creator (who alone knows how to care for our soul):

1 Peter 5:7-8: “Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”

Philippians 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

If we cast your anxieties upon Christ, we rob the devil of his point of contact within our soul.

Anxiety is faithlessness in that it denies the Lord's promise of logistical grace blessings – that *He* is the source of our provision in life.

Paul wrote: “And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (**Philippians 4:19**)

9) Closing thoughts.

The American Church obviously understands little about what persecution truly means.

To many American believers, *suffering for Jesus* means hitting traffic on the way to church.

“I can't make it all the time because! I have a half hour drive!”

Perhaps this is what Jesus was getting at when He said that the Queen of Sheba [or the *Queen of the South*] will stand up in judgment against you because she traveled hundreds of miles to hear Solomon who didn't even have the finished work!⁸

⁸ Matthew 12:42, NASB: “[Jesus is speaking:] *The Queen of the South* shall rise up with this generation at the judgment and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”