



Daily Verse and Comment

Matthew 5:10

(10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

King James Version

Strong's Concordance reveals that "persecute" (Greek *dioko*) means "to pursue, follow after or press toward." *Vine's Expository Dictionary* adds "to put to flight or drive away." Only within certain contexts does it take on the sense of oppression, ill treatment, abuse, tyranny, and even martyrdom and murder. Persecution is aggressive and injurious behavior carried out in a hostile, antagonistic spirit, normally by a group, but occasionally by one individual toward another. It is often carried out with fiery zeal, as Paul remarks about his persecution of the church ([Philippians 3:6](#)), but the persecuted must always remember that the fiery zeal bent against them is, according to [Romans 10:2](#), "not according to knowledge." Thus Jesus, while dying on the stake, asks His Father to forgive His persecutors, "for they do not know what they do" ([Luke 23:34](#)).

In the Bible, especially in the New Testament, persecution is so pervasive that it is presented as a more or less expected terror. Jesus, the epitome of righteousness, is also the focal point of persecution. As such, He clearly reveals persecution's source. In John 8 the Pharisees challenge Jesus' assertion of who He was, and the ensuing discussion leads to revealing its source.

The Jews claim to be Abraham's descendants and never in bondage to any man (though at the time they were subject to the Romans). Their statement is partly true. Jesus readily acknowledges they are physically Abraham's descendants, but He adds in verse 40, "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man

who has told you the truth which I heard from [God](#). Abraham did not do this." He implies that, if they were truly Abraham's children, their conduct would display his characteristics, and they would not be persecuting Him.

[Satan](#) the Devil is the source of persecution of those bearing and living the truth of God (verses 41, 44). At times he undoubtedly works through people whom he has duped and inflamed to unrelenting anger toward God's people so that the persecution appears to be entirely of men. But the Bible reveals the reality of Satan as the source.

The church bears the brunt of Satan's persecution because, as the body of [Jesus Christ](#) ([Ephesians 1:22-23](#)), it is the group of people in whom Christ is being formed ([Galatians 4:19](#)). Jesus warns us that this will occur:

If [the world](#) hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "A servant 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. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me. ([John 15:18-21](#))

Thus, because of our relationship to Jesus Christ, persecution becomes our lot in life. Luke movingly describes this sense of solidarity and union with Christ during Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. Christ calls out, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" ([Acts 9:4](#)). Just three verses earlier, he writes, "Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest." Paul had physically and psychologically abused the members of the church, but Christ considers any attack against His church to be an attack against Himself personally.

His disciples can count on persecution. In fact, persecution serves as a sign of the authenticity of his relationship to Jesus Christ, as [Philippians 1:27-30](#) attests:

Only let your conduct be worthy of [the gospel](#) of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the [faith](#) of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God. For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me.

The Bible also shows that the disciple's response to persecution is a veritable litmus test to determine that authenticity. Notice these two passages:

» But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with [joy](#); yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ([Matthew 13:20-21](#))

» Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the [love of many will grow cold](#). But he who endures to the end shall be saved. ([Matthew 24:9-13](#))

Clearly, God will count as righteous those who respond to persecution in faith.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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[The Beatitudes, Part 8: Blessed Are the Persecuted](#)

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