



Daily Verse and Comment

Matthew 5:10-12

(10) Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11) Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. (12) Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

King James Version

This beatitude presents us with yet another paradox. The other [beatitudes](#) show that a Christian can be filled with a [joy](#) that he cannot fully express, yet lament over things that the carnal consider as insignificant. He has a deep and abiding sense of satisfaction, yet groans daily and sincerely. His life-experiences are often painful, yet he would not part with them for the great wealth, acclaim, and ease that [the world](#) offers. Though the world exalts those filled with pride, self-esteem, and assertiveness, [God](#) exalts the humble and [meek](#). The world displays its approval for war-makers by giving them ticker-tape parades, putting them into high office, and remembering their achievements by naming streets, cities, parks, and schools after them—yet God blesses [peacemakers](#). In line with these other paradoxes, this last Beatitude also states a paradox: All we receive for well-doing is to earn the antipathy of our fellow men.

We need to understand the connection between righteousness and persecution because not every sufferer or even every sufferer of religious persecution suffers for righteousness' sake. Many suffer persecution for zealously holding fast to what is clearly a false religion. Often, a rival religious group or civil authority—just as ignorant of God's truth—are the persecutors. At any given time, persecutions of one form or another are taking place. In the recent past the Japanese persecuted the Koreans, the Chinese, and the Nepalese. In Africa, the Moslem Sudanese are persecuting

nominal Christians, while in Europe, the Slavic Eastern Orthodox are persecuting Moslem Kosovars. In the history of man, this familiar beat of persecution continues endlessly with nary a connection to righteousness.

Some people become victims of their own character flaws and personality disorders. They foolishly take comfort in [Matthew 5:10-12](#), claiming persecution when others merely retaliate against their displays of evil speaking, haughtiness, or self-centeredness. Such people are just reaping what they have sown.

[Psalm 119:172](#) says, "My tongue shall speak of Your word; for all Your commandments are righteousness." This is a simple, straightforward definition of righteousness. It is rectitude, right doing. God's commands thus describe how to live correctly. They teach us how to conduct relationships with Him and fellow man. This beatitude is written about those who are truly doing this. They will receive persecution because they are living correctly—not because they have irritated or infuriated others through their sins or because they belong to another political party, religion, or ethnic group.

Does anything illustrate the perversity of human nature clearer than this? We might think that one could hardly be more pleased than to have neighbors who are absolutely trustworthy; who will not murder, commit [adultery](#) or fornication, steal, lie, or covet one's possessions; who rear respectful children; who are an asset to the neighborhood; who so respect God they will not even use His name in vain; who submit to the civil laws and do not even flout the codes and covenants of the neighborhood.

However, this description does not mention the relationship to God that really brings the persecution. These are things moral people of this world might do, yet they lack the true God in their lives and are not regenerated by His Spirit. An element of righteousness is still missing. Paul writes in [Romans 8:14-17](#):

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—joint heirs with Christ,

if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The source of true persecution is [Satan](#), and his target is God. Satan not only hates God, but he also hates all who bear His holy image in them by means of His Spirit. Satan works in and through people just as God does, and he incites them to do all in their power to vilify, destroy the reputation of, put fear in, or discourage God's children to cause their disqualification. He will do anything to get us to retaliate as worldly people do, because then we would display Satan's image rather than Jesus Christ's. Satan knows those who have the Spirit of God, and just as he tempted Jesus, he will also single out His brothers and sisters for persecution.

The righteousness needed to resist these pressures and respond in a godly manner goes far beyond that of a merely moral person. This righteousness requires that one be living by [faith](#) minute by minute, day by day, week by week, month by month, and year by year. It is a righteousness that is ingrained into a person's very character because he knows God. He is intimately acquainted with Him and His purpose rather than merely believing academically that He exists.

Following on the heels of this beatitude is another statement by Jesus on righteousness: "For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the [kingdom of heaven](#)" ([Matthew 5:20](#)). He focuses on a righteousness that is not merely legal, resulting from God graciously justifying us by Christ's blood, but one inculcated within the heart and mind by constantly living God's way. Such a person's righteousness comes through sanctification. He is striving to keep all the commandments of God, not merely those having to do with public morality. He has made prayer and study a significant part of each day, along with occasional fasting to assist in keeping humble. He is well on his way toward the [Kingdom of God](#).

These are not normally things that one does publicly; his neighbors may never know much of this person's life. Nonetheless, Satan knows, and this person's living faith will attract Satan's persecution, the Devil's attempts to derail him from making it.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

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

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