



"Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

—John Quincy Adams

27-Jul-12

## Facing Persecution

As America continues to shed its Christian values and heritage, the incidence of persecution of Christians is bound to increase. Just this week, news outlets reported on the backlash against fast-food chain Chick-fil-A<sup>®</sup> by militant homosexuals after company president, Dan Cathy, a devout Baptist, made statements supporting traditional marriage that angered gay-rights advocates and supporters. Homosexual groups are planning "kiss-ins" in front of Chick-fil-A<sup>®</sup> stores all over the nation on August 1, as well as rallies and protests to promote boycotts against the unashamedly Christian restaurant. Mr. Cathy is certainly feeling a measure of persecution for exercising his Constitutional rights to free speech and religious belief.

Granted, this level of persecution falls in the "mild" range. We have not even reached the amount of persecution that the Hebrews had faced when the apostle wrote his epistle to them: "You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against [sin](#)" ([Hebrews 12:4](#)), though in earlier days, they had "endured a great struggle with sufferings: . . . [been] made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and . . . accepted the plundering of [their]

goods" ([Hebrews 10:32-34](#)). So, while we are yet unmarked by the more violent kinds of persecution, we would do well to prepare ourselves for the eventuality of it.

How, then, does [Jesus Christ](#) expect us to face persecution? What attitudes should we have when it comes and as it continues? By considering a few scriptures, we can receive a taste of how Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets approached the persecutions they endured.

Beyond [faith](#), which is a given for any child of [God](#) at all times, the first and perhaps foundational attitude we need to employ is [patience](#). We must remember that God is at work and that He does not work on our timetable. Most of all, for us, He is working on transforming our character into a reflection of His own, and that takes time. James writes ". . . the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" ([James 1:3-4](#)). The apostle Peter chimes in on this too:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. ([I Peter 2:19-20](#))

Peter uses the Greek word *hupomone*, which implies "endurance," "perseverance," or "unswerving constancy." We are to wait on God for deliverance, bearing up courageously through our suffering and not giving in. As David writes in [Psalm 40:1-2](#): "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps." No matter how difficult the situation, He will save us from our persecutors; we will just have to trust Him to effect that deliverance when it is best.

In the middle of trouble, perhaps the last thing on a person's mind is to be positive. Most people just want to cry, to feel self-pity, to complain, to become depressed, and to feel abandoned. However, the great examples of faith found that the opposite reaction is far better. Our attitude needs to

reflect *a desire to glorify God*. As Peter advises in [I Peter 4:16](#), "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

This means that, as we suffer, we should give Him praise and thanksgiving. Paul and Silas, unjustly thrown into prison in Philippi, did not let their situation get them down. [Acts 16:25](#) informs us that "at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns"! We are told that the other apostles, on trial before the Sanhedrin, were "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" ([Acts 5:41](#)).

We also glorify Him in the manner in which we endure the suffering—not just in the words we speak, but also our behavior. Paul saw persecution as a means to give glory to God:

But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. And I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen! ([II Timothy 4:17-18](#))

The third attitude may be even more difficult to do. Peter commands us in [I Peter 4:19](#), "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." During persecution, enduring perhaps horrible suffering, a Christian should *do good*. In reality, that is what makes him a Christian. He must rise above his situation and continue to carry out acts of love, even toward his persecutors. It is part of Jesus' [Sermon on the Mount](#): "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" ([Matthew 5:44-45](#)).

During his crucifixion, Jesus practiced what He had preached, continuing to preach [the gospel](#) of the Kingdom to His dying breath. He comforted the daughters of Jerusalem ([Luke 23:27-31](#)) and promised the thief next to him an opportunity for salvation (verses 39-43). He also asked His Father to forgive His murderers (verse 34). No matter what the circumstances, He

never stopped showing love to all, even to His enemies. Paul imitated this example, boldly preaching the gospel while in chains, and doing so actually furthered the cause of the gospel rather than hindered it ([Philippians 1:12-18](#)).

Finally, we must have an attitude of [joy](#). Again, it is Peter who advises us: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you. But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" ([I Peter 4:12-13](#)).

This is a tough order, but it is not impossible. However, notice that he includes a qualification on this, that we are to be joyful if we are suffering for a righteous reason, sharing Christ's sufferings. But if we are suffering as a result of our own stupidity, we need to [repent](#)!

James tells us in [James 1:2](#), "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials." It is not natural to rejoice in the midst of suffering, but we can do it because the Holy Spirit is working in us, giving us God's perspective and strength to endure (see [I Peter 1:3-9](#)). That is the only way we can rejoice in suffering, knowing that God has counted us worthy of it.

Obviously, no one wants to be persecuted, but "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" ([II Timothy 3:12](#)). Yet, if we do, we have Christ's promise that it is for our good: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the [kingdom of heaven](#)" ([Matthew 5:10](#)).

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Perseverance and Hope](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In the turbulent and uncertain times ahead, we will need extraordinary fortitude and courage. From the confusion and anxiety of our trials, we run,

hide, fight, or patiently work through the difficulties. Not much in this world inspires hope or permanent relief. As our Designer and Producer, God has designed us to function smoothly and productively on a godly formula of faith, hope, and love. Trials, when rightly handled with this powerful formula, produce a higher level of spiritual maturity, improving perseverance or active endurance, motivating a person to overcome and grow in holiness. Our entire hope and faith (to be conformed and resurrected in Christ's image) must be anchored in God, with Christ's mind placed within us.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Fruit of the Spirit: Patience](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Bible's perspective, patience is far more than simple endurance or longsuffering. The patience that God has shown man collectively and individually gives us an example of what true, godly patience is. It is this kind of patience that Paul urges us to put on as part of the new man.

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