

## THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

"Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it."  
– 1 Cor. 4:12.

SINCE GOD HIMSELF is Love, the very highest ideal of perfection which He has given to His people is the standard of Love. We cannot imagine a higher standard than this, nor one more difficult to attain. It is the special characteristic without which none will get the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This mark of perfection was stamped on our Lord. He delighted to do the Father's will in all respects, even to the extent of laying down His life for those who, on account of Adam's sin, were under the sentence of death.

Our Lord did not, however, need to run toward this mark of perfect love; for He was *always perfect* – "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26.) The Church, on the contrary, are naturally imperfect and fallen by heredity; but we have been washed from all stain of guilt in the blood of the Lamb. The mark of perfect love *we* attain *gradually*. We first reach perfection of heart intention, and then we pass through experiences which crystallize our characters in righteousness. In all of these trials and difficulties, we must demonstrate that, if our physical organism were perfect, we would always do God's holy will.

As we see this quality of love in our Lord Jesus, we appreciate it, even though we realize that we are not up to the standard which God requires. Nevertheless, our great desire is that we have perfect love for everything in harmony with the will of God. After we have reached perfection of heart intention, the test is no longer upon us of *attaining* the mark, but of *pressing down upon* that mark *until our character has been crystallized*. As the Apostle Paul says, "Having done all, *stand*." (Eph. 6:13.) We do not progress

beyond *perfect love*; for no one can do more than to have a full desire that God's will be done in him. He could do no more, whether he lived five years longer or fifty years. Perfect love is the mark toward which he pressed, and he can attain no higher standard.

While one stands at the mark of Love, the *tests* grow *stronger*. We pass through experiences – often trivial enough – which tempt us to malice, envy, anger and strife. If we are overcome by these tests, and fall away from the condition of *perfect love*, we shall lose the prize for which we are running. (Phil. 3:14.) One who thus falls away may get into the Great Company for development; but if he were to lose all love, he would go into the Second Death. In either of these cases, the person has moved away from the mark of perfect Love, the only standard for those who desire to be in the Kingdom and to participate in the glorious things which God has in store for those who love Him supremely.

## **GENEROSITY AND BENEVOLENCE CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

Our Lord desires to see in His followers the disposition to overcome the weaknesses and tendencies of the fallen condition and to follow in His footsteps. Of Him it is written, "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in His steps;...who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." (I Peter 2:21-23.) To be reviled is to be made to *appear vile*, to be evil spoken of, slandered. The natural tendency of all is to resent injustice, to render evil for evil, to give as good as we get – and a little more if possible. This is the natural inclination because we are in the fallen condition, unbalanced in our minds.

Our Lord's teaching is all the opposite of the spirit of reviling. No matter how much we are reviled, we are not to revile in return; no matter how much we are persecuted, we are not to persecute in return. This is the Law of the New Creation. Instead of reviling

again, we are to *ble*ss. This does not mean that when one has said a slanderous thing of us, we are to say, "God bless you"; but that if the person is in difficulty and needs help, we are to overlook altogether what he has done to us, and be just as ready to help him as any other person.

This spirit of generosity and benevolence should be the spirit of the Lord's people. We are to bless those who revile and persecute us by doing them good and by explaining to them, if possible, the situation, which evidently they have misunderstood. We are to bless them by helping them, if opportunity offers, out of darkness into light.

Our faith is greatly strengthened by considering the course of our Lord and noting the similarity between His experiences and ours. Both He and His Apostles were persecuted by the Jewish household of faith. The whole Jewish nation professed to be God's people; and our Lord recognized them as His own, as it is written. (John 1:11.) Yet when "He came unto His own," they received Him not, but persecuted Him and even crucified Him. Later, they persecuted His Apostles and their followers.

Apparently the household of faith has had a monopoly of persecutions. All down the Gospel Age, those who have professed to be God's people have persecuted others. [R5172 : page 36] Both Catholics and Protestants have persecuted each other and the Jews, God's chosen people. The majority of persecutions have been by those who professed to be the people of God, many of whom really *thought they were*.

The persecutions of today are of the same kind. They come from those who profess to be the Lord's people. In harmony with this fact is the Scripture which says, "Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for My Name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified: but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." (Isa. 66:5.) This statement applies also to the members of our own

families, who are not in sympathy with the Truth; that is to say, any persecutions coming from the members of our families are usually from those who profess to be Christians. As a rule, their opposition is not for personal reasons, but on account of some doctrinal point, which they do not see in the same light as do those whom they persecute.

It behooves the Lord's people to look with great sympathy upon those who may be their persecutors. We recall instances where persecution has been carried on with the thought that the persecutors were doing the will of God. Those who persecuted the Lord Jesus were to some degree ignorant of who He was. In Acts 3:17, St. Peter says, "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." St. Paul says, "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (I Cor. 2:8.) When Saul of Tarsus persecuted St. Stephen and others of the early Church, he verily thought that he did God service, as he himself afterwards tells us. – Acts 26:9-11.

### **FIDELITY TO THE TRUTH A CAUSE OF PERSECUTION**

All down through the Gospel Age, those who have been faithful to the Truth of God have been put "out of the synagogue." The creeds of men have been barriers to keep out those who understood the Word of God. There was a time when many were excommunicated as heretics *because of conscience*. One of these was Michael Servetus, a brother Christian, whose horrible death at the stake was brought about by John Calvin. This course of conduct literally fulfilled the Scripture which says, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." – John 16:2.

Those who had charge of the synagogues were not always *bad* people, but they were *mistaken*, as was Saul of Tarsus when he haled men and women to prison. (Acts 8:3.) The same

conditions exist today. The darkness hateth the light. When any become enlightened in the Word of God, they are told, "If you stay with us, you must not present these matters." Those who are loyal to God are in this way forced out of the synagogues.

Our day has a peculiarity, however, that other days have not had. The Divine Plan is so beautiful that by its light we see that others are in darkness. The voice of God, the voice of conscience, of enlightenment, calls the **[R5173 : page 36]** people of God out of Babylon, which is misrepresenting God's character, Plan and Word. Instead of feeling like bringing vengeance upon our enemies, we should feel sympathy for them – not *with* them, but *for* them. We should realize that with them it is very much as it was with the Jews of our Lord's day, who, had they known what they were doing, would have been very much ashamed of their course.

The persecutions of today are different from those of any other period of history. Many faithful followers of the Lord are reprov'd and slandered for their loyalty to the Word of God. Our Lord's words, however, warrant us in expecting that those who are faithful to Him will be evil spoken of, even as He was. With His words before our minds, we should not be surprised at false charges and false insinuations made against His true followers in proportion to their prominence as His servants.

Our Lord's warning that men "shall say *all manner of evil* against you *falsely for My sake*" (Matt. 5:11), does not imply that those who malign the true Christian will say, "We do this to you for Christ's sake, because you are one of His followers." We have never heard of any one who was thus persecuted, and therefore such a course cannot be what our Lord meant. Evidently His meaning was that His followers, honorable, moderate, truthful, honest, virtuous, possessing the spirit of a sound mind, like Himself, would be highly esteemed amongst the nominally religious, were it not for their loyalty to the Word of God. Because of faithfully pointing out

popular errors, because of fidelity to the Truth, they are hated by those prominent in Churchianity.

## **THE GOLDEN RULE A TEST TO CHRISTIANS**

These conditions are testing the adherents of Churchianity along the lines of the Golden Rule; and when they speak evil through malice, hatred, strife and opposition, they are condemning themselves under that rule; for well do they know that they do not wish others to speak evil of them – either through hearsay or through concocted lies or through malice.

These conditions are also a test to the Lord's people, to prove whether they are willing to endure these persecutions and oppositions cheerfully, as a part of the cost of being disciples of Christ. If under the pressure they revile in return and slander and backbite, they are thus demonstrating their unfitness to have a place in the Kingdom. If, on the other hand, they receive these lessons with patience and long-suffering, they will develop more of the character-likeness of their Redeemer and thus become more worthy of a share with Him in the future glory.

Our Lord's declaration, "Ye are the salt of the earth," may very properly be applied to those of the followers of the Lord who give heed to His teachings and who cultivate His character-likeness. As salt is useful in arresting decomposition, so the influence of these faithful ones is preservative. At the time of the First Advent, the world was in a condition in which it would probably have hastened to degeneracy and decay, but for the introduction of the preservative influence extending from the members of the Body of Christ. That influence is still manifest in so-called Christendom.

Even today, although the truly consecrated believers in the great Redeemer are confessedly few in number, yet the saltiness from the teachings of the Savior has a wide influence upon the world. Without it, doubtless, corruption and a complete collapse would



have come long ago. In spite of it, we see very corrupting and corrupt influences at work everywhere; and the wider our horizon, the more general our information, the more we realize the truth of this statement. When the last member of the Body of Christ shall have passed beyond the veil, the salt will be gone. Then corruption will take hold swiftly, and the result will be the great time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation. – Matt. 24:21; Dan. 12:1.

The Scriptures point out the fact that the Lord's consecrated people belong so completely to Him that in all their afflictions He is afflicted. (Isa. 63:9.) When Saul of Tarsus was persecuting the early Church, our Lord called out to him on the way to Damascus, and said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME? And he said, [R5173 : page 37] Who are Thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am *Jesus*, whom thou *persecutest*." (Acts 9:4,5.) Saul was not persecuting the glorified Savior directly, but he was persecuting the *followers* of Jesus – not the *New Creatures*, but the *flesh*. Since, then, our Lord adopts the flesh of His followers as His, the Church is said to be filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. – Col. 1:24.

Throughout the Gospel Age, the world has been blind to the fact that it has persecuted the Church of Christ – those whom God has chosen to be joint-heirs with our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 8:17.) When later the eyes of mankind shall have been opened, they will realize what they have done, and will be very much ashamed of their conduct. After Saul of Tarsus saw that he had been fighting against God, his whole course of life was changed.

## **THE ANTITYPICAL BURNING OUTSIDE THE CAMP**

As our Lord suffered in the flesh, so will also those who are members of the Church, which is His Body. (Eph. 1:22,23.) St. Peter admonishes us to expect this, saying, "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same mind." (I Peter 4:1.) It is the *flesh*, not the *New Creature*,

that *suffers*. While we are suffering in the flesh, we are also being developed in the spirit.

In Psalm 44:22, we read, "For Thy sake we are killed all the Day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." St. Paul shows that this statement is a prophecy applicable to the entire membership of Christ, of whom our Lord Jesus is the Head. (Rom. 8:36.) The day to which reference is made is the Gospel Age (2 Cor. 6:2), the antitypical Day of Atonement. As on the typical Atonement Day the typical sacrifices were offered, so all down the Gospel Age the antitypical "better sacrifices" have been made. (Heb. 9:23; 13:11-13.) These "better sacrifices" began with our Lord and continue with His Body, which is the Church.

The antitypical sacrificing began at the time of our Lord's consecration, which was His full surrender of His life to God, to be used in any way that the Father saw fit and that His providences might direct. The Church follows in His steps. Our consecration is our death to the world, to earthly hopes, aims and ambitions. In our Lord's case, we see that His sacrificial death not only meant the giving away of His physical strength in healing, teaching, etc., but included also the suffering resulting from the opposition of those about Him. Even from members of His own family He experienced ostracism. So Jesus died daily.

In proportion as we are faithful to our Heavenly Father and to the terms of our consecration, we shall have similar experiences. Faithfulness to our covenant of sacrifice will bring upon us opposition from the world, the flesh and the Devil. Particularly will our persecution come from those Christians who are not developed sufficiently to appreciate matters from the proper standpoint.

St. Paul, in speaking of his own case, says that he was dying daily. (I Cor. 15:31.) This statement applies to all who are laying down their lives in the Lord's service. Sometimes it is by the expenditure of physical strength; sometimes it is by a stab from



some one who has hurt us, wounded us, injured us with his tongue. In the type, this kind of experience is represented by the burning of the flesh outside the camp, a place which typifies the outcast condition.

The faithful servants of the Lord will be ostracised by the world, as our Lord foretold. (Matt. 24:9; John 16:1-3.) Their attitude of full consecration to do the Father's will is not appreciated; for to the world it seems to be foolish. It is a reproof. As our Lord said, "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd." – John 3:20.

To be faithful unto death is a part of the covenant of sacrifice. In some instances, death may come early; in others, it may come late. St. Stephen was faithful unto death, which came early in his Christian experience; St. Peter was also faithful, but met his death after a long lifetime. The promise to the overcomer is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10.) "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." – 2 Tim. 2:12.

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