

God Has Spoken
Tract Series

“Suffer Persecution”?

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

(II Timothy 3:12)

Did Paul write that persecution is inevitably a fact of the life of a Christian? Does his statement to Timothy mean that a person not being persecuted is not living “godly in Christ Jesus”?

As with every form of human communication we must consider the entire context of words in order to understand the actual intent of the speaker or writer. If we consider Second Timothy three twelve alone we might conclude that every Christian will suffer persecution, and nothing but persecution. Why did Paul write at this point in this epistle, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”?

The statement immediately follows Paul’s reference to his own “persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra” (verse 11). That reference in context is a reminder to Timothy that Paul served God faithfully regardless of the behavior of others. Timothy knew Paul’s “doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, and patience” (verse 10). Paul held these even though he was afflicted and persecuted in Timothy’s presence “at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.”

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.
(Hebrews 1:1-2).

Immediately after the verse 12 sentence Paul warned Timothy that persecutors would become “worse and worse” (verse 13). Despite that sad prophecy Timothy is urged to continue in the truth he had learned, and to remember the example of those who had taught him (verses 14-15). In this context Timothy is reminded of the origin and power of the Bible (verses 16-17), and is charged to continue to preach the word of Christ with urgency and consistency (4:1-2).

Is it reasonable to believe that Paul received no blessings for following Jesus, yet continued to follow Him? Is it reasonable to suppose that Paul had nothing but persecution in his life, yet urged a young man to follow his way of life? Is it reasonable to imagine that the young man might have been eager to adopt a way of life that he knew was going to lead him into nothing but affliction and persecution, without any blessings along the way? Is it reasonable to believe that any of our neighbors will want to be Christians if we preach to them such a doctrine as this? There is nothing reasonable about any of these, and there is nothing true in the doctrine that unrelenting persecution is the lot of every faithful Christian.

In seeking the understanding of verse 13 it is helpful to review Paul’s experiences in those cities which he names in this context. In the cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra he indeed suffered “afflictions” and “persecutions,” but let’s look again.

Paul had *freedom* to travel to the city of Antioch (Acts 15:14). He entered peacefully into the synagogue and *enjoyed* the company of others in the reading of the law and the prophets. He had the *respect* of the rulers of the synagogue who asked him to speak a word of exhortation to all those assembled. He had the *peace* of mind that came from knowing that he understood those Old Testament words and how God’s eternal plan is fulfilled in Jesus (verses 16 through 41). The following week he was *encouraged* to see “almost the whole city together to hear the word of God” (verse 44). Paul had the *satisfaction* of seeing “the word of the Lord ... published throughout all the region” (verse 49).

Freedom, joy, respect, peace, encourage-ment, and satisfaction are blessings that almost every person in the world desires.

In Iconium the same blessings were his, and he stayed there a “long time” (Acts 14:3). Far beyond all of those, Paul in Iconium had the tremendous blessing of seeing God’s power working through him in “signs and wonders” (verse 3).

In Lystra all of these blessings continued, as they did everywhere Paul traveled. In Jerusalem he had the fellowship of the apostles and the church (Galatians 2:9). Everybody wants a friend. Paul had many friends who helped him everywhere (Acts 28:30-31). In Corinth friends provided him lodging and a job (Acts 18:1-3). In Ephesus he stayed in safety for three years (Acts 20:31), and when trouble came he had friends who protected him from it (19:30). Paul had friends who were profitable to him (II Timothy 4:11). He had financial support from friends as he traveled (Philippians 4:16; II Corinthians 11:7-8). He was blessed to have a coat, and a collection of books and papers, and a secure place in which to leave them (II Timothy 4:13).

If Paul taught that there are no blessings in this world he lied, for he himself was a much-blessed man. But what more does God’s word say about blessings in this world?

Jesus promised that those who follow after him, though they may have to leave their families and suffer some persecution, shall still receive “now in this time houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands” (Mark 10:29-30).

John expected Christians to prosper both physically and spiritually (III John 2). Peter, Andrew, and Matthew had their own houses (Mark 1:29; Luke 5:27-29), as did Chloe (I Corinthians 1:11) and Lydia (Acts 16:15).

It is simply not true that a Christian has no blessings in this world. We have in Christ joy, peace, hope, a place to sleep, food to eat, clothes to wear, God’s air to breathe, and His water to drink.

Then what does Paul mean in saying that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”?

“Persecution” is a general description of a state of affairs. “Persecutions” are specific acts of persecution which may arise occasionally in a generally peaceful life. Paul - blessed in many ways as he traveled across the Roman Empire preaching the cross of Christ – wrote that he suffered “persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra.” They were not constantly - minute by minute – upon him; they “came unto” him from time to time.

There are many welcome blessings in the life of a faithful Christian diligently serving the Lord in this sin-filled world. The informed servant knows that persecutions and afflictions are likely to intrude upon his peace occasionally. Because he is converted to Christ he does not let the persecutions obscure the blessings. He knows that he will be able to say with Paul “out of them all the Lord delivered me” (II Timothy 3:11).



Skyway Publishing
P. O. Box 662
Lincoln, IL 62656
the literature work of Confirming the Churches
www.skywaypub.org