Loving Witness

What should our attitude be when we are being persecuted for the Word of God's sake?

An Attitude of Forgiveness

Luke 9:52-56 tells us that Jesus was rejected by the people in the area of Samaria. The disciples, James and John (then known as the Sons of Thunder now known as the Followers of Love), said something to Jesus when they left the city. They asked, "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?"

Luke 9:54 In other words, the people had not received what Jesus had shared. James and John basically said, "We are sharing the truth and they have rejected it, Lord. Shall we call down fire and have them destroyed for not believing upon You, in fact rejecting You and sending You out of the city?"

Jesus had a reply. (Verses 55&56) *"But He turned, and rebuked them, and said, 'Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.' And they went to another village."*

When we undergo persecution for speaking the Word of God and the truth of God, we need to have a very important attitude. Jesus did not say that the disciples were not able to call down the fire like Elijah did, but that there was a better and higher way of turning people's hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here we see an act of love on God's part moving through Jesus. This same Jesus, on the cross, as He was giving His life for us, His people, said, *"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."* Luke 23:34 It would appear that these people knew what they were doing. This was premeditated, calculated murder."

People appear to know what they are doing and they think they know. However, they are deceived by the devil; they do not really know what they are doing. This is what Jesus pointed out, "Father, forgive them; (Give them an opportunity for life. Grant them life. Do not hold this sin against their charge.)"

The first recorded account of martyrdom in the New Testament is in Acts 7:60. A man named Stephen had told the people the truth about God, about the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth about themselves. The people did not want to hear it. They stopped up their ears, yelled at the top of their voices and picked up rocks to throw at Stephen. As they were stoning him, he looked up to heaven and said, *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* In other words, *"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

It is very important that we take hold of this attitude, especially if we are in situations where people do not seem to understand what we believe. We have heard this many times: "Since you have come to this Jesus, you are different. I do not want to have anything to do with you. I do not like you anymore. I do not want you around." These are husband and wife situations I am talking about too. This will happen quite often because light and darkness do not mix.

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"What does light have in common with darkness? What do children of God have in common with the children of the devil?" Absolutely nothing!

I would like to show you how you can, by the Spirit of God, win a person over to the Lord Jesus Christ by your attitudes and actions. This will allow the Spirit of God to move upon the individual.

God is drawing the people of this world to Himself through the people who love Him. They are a shining, bright and bold witness to His glory. Those who are shining lights for the Lord Jesus Christ are the ones whose lights the devil wants to put out and the ones whom the world wants to stop. They want them to compromise God's Word. *"Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, etc. more than Me is not worthy of Me,"* Jesus said.

We cannot afford to compromise that which we know to be true, even if it is at the expense of losing everyone and everything around us. I would like to show you something that will enable God to touch those people's lives and move to change their hearts, so that they too may receive the life that we know and enjoy.

Do Not Quarrel

"And the servant of the Lord must not strive (quarrel), *but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." 2nd Timothy 2:24-26*

When we deal with people who do not understand or know what we believe, they may want to pick a fight or get into an argument with us. They want to prove us wrong. The servant of the Lord must never quarrel or enter into any such striving with people. The Bible says that we are to be gentle to everyone. We are to be ready to teach when the occasion presents itself. When people start asking questions, then we can share. 1st Peter 3:15

We are to be patient. This does not happen overnight and many people give up just when things are starting to break through. We need to develop patience, which comes through tribulation and from standing for what we know to be true. It comes from holding on to the Word of God in spite of the situations that are happening around us. As we hold on to God's Word, patience is developed within us and we will see the victory of our God.

"In meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves…" The only difference between a believer and a non-believer is that a believer has come to the light, has asked forgiveness and has invited Jesus into his heart as Lord and Savior. It is just that simple! It is not that we are or have done anything better than anyone else. It is just that we have realized that Jesus is Lord and that we need the Lord, not only to be there, but to control every part of our lives. We need to constantly remember that we were once like those other people. Titus 3:1-8

It is easy, once you have come to the Lord Jesus and are growing in the Word of God and the faith message (you are believing God's promises) to look down your nose at others who do not know the Lord yet or do not understand these truths. In God's time framework, it was only yesterday that you received.

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We may have said, "You are just a non-believer, you cannot be expected to understand this." We may pray for someone and believe God for his salvation and yet constantly treat him like an unbeliever. Thus we work against the prayer of faith. If we do this, we work against everything we are believing and claiming. If we claim someone for life in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we ought to start treating him like he is already saved, even though at this point he is not necessarily able to receive the Word.

Treat him like a Christian. Love him. Does God's Word not say we are to love everyone? That includes unbelievers, not just believers or those who see things the way we see them. This is the love of God: that while we were yet enemies, He sent Jesus to die for us on the cross. He died that we might have His life, even when we were opposing ourselves.

"If the gospel which I preach is hid, it is hid to those who are lost. In whom the god of this world (Satan) *hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* 2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

The gospel, or good news, about Jesus is hid from those who are lost. Satan has blinded them, lest they receive the truth and be set free. Therefore, we do not approach them argumentatively but in a spirit of gentleness, ready to answer their questions, being patient with them, not condemning nor pointing God's Word out to them.

Trying to hold the Bible over people's heads will just antagonize them and make things worse for you. Meekness is the kind of quality that says, "I have been there and I know what is going on in your heart and in your head. As God has set me free, He will do the same thing for you!" The Bible says in 2nd Timothy 2:25- 26**,** *"God will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil."* In other words, they will see the light. I believe it is based, in many respects, on how we respond to them. How we respond to unbelievers determines whether they will receive the light and whether they will receive what we have to tell them.

How do we approach them? Do we approach them arrogantly, like we know everything and they know nothing? What is our attitude to be when we approach those who do not yet know the Lord Jesus Christ?

<u>Rejoice in the Lord</u>

In Matthew 5:10-12 the Lord Jesus said something important to those who are going through persecution for the Word of God. Our attitudes need to be in line so that people will see that the persecution, which the devil intended for our harm (Mark 4), will actually be turned around by God to our good as we respond the way God would have us respond. Genesis 50:20, those who are watching will not be able to figure it out. They will fall on their faces before God when they realize that the God we believe in is real and that He loves and cares for His people.

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." Matthew 5:10-12

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The Bible says when we are persecuted for the sake of the Word of God in our houses, families, churches, or wherever we are, we are counted blessed in God's sight. We are to rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for our reward is great in heaven. When we are being persecuted for the Word of God's sake, we need to rejoice! Rejoice in the Lord that we are counted worthy to suffer shame for His name's sake, just as He did.

The servant is not greater than the Master. We will be persecuted when we step out in boldness on God's Word. However, we will not call down fire to destroy these people. We will love them into God's Kingdom. 1st Peter 3:15-18 We will rejoice in our God, because we have the victory in spite of what we see happening around us or to us.

Often there is a tendency to lose joy when being persecuted for the Word of God or what we believe in Jesus. The pressure comes to try to take away our joy. The Bible says, *"The joy of the Lord is our strength."* Nehemiah 8:10 What do we need in times of trial and persecution? We need strength. As we rejoice in the Lord and rejoice in the fact that it is not we who are being persecuted but Jesus in us, then the power of God will be able to move into our situation and set people free.

For Husbands and Wives

In a marriage where one believes in the Lord and the other does not and persecution comes, the tendency is to say, "I want out. I cannot take this anymore!" Bear up under the persecution, stand strong in what you know and believe to be true and see the power of God move in your behalf. In 1st Corinthians 7:10-15 Paul told us, *"And unto the married I command, yet not I but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife. But to the rest speak I, not the Lord: if any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away."*

Just because a woman does not believe in the Lord Jesus does not mean that her husband kicks her out, nor should he antagonize her into leaving.

"And the woman which has a husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him. For the unbelieving husband [note this] is sanctified (made holy) by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean: but now are they holy. But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace."

1st Corinthians 7:13-15. This Scripture is not saying to marry again. *"For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband, or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"* There may be a time in which a spouse leaves and the other stays. It may be during that time that the unbelieving partner comes to the Lord. If you marry again, it will complicate the issue.

God's perfect will (note, perfect will) is that husbands and wives be one in the Lord. How do you know, wives or husbands, that a husband or wife is not going to come to know Jesus Christ as Lord? If you hold fast to the Word of God, you will be able to believe them into the kingdom.

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Commit Your Cause to the Father

Look at 1st Peter 2:19-23: *"For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it,* [You are being obedient to the Word of God and you are standing for Christ]*, ye take it patiently, and this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously."*

We are to commit our cause to the Father who judges justly. This is what Jesus did. He knew He was in right standing with God. He knew that everything that happened was not because of what He did, but because the people hated what He was sharing, who He believed in and what He stood for. He did not attack them. He did not need to attack them or speak against them because He committed His cause to the Father God who judges justly. Jesus loved the people.

"Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree [on the cross], that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." 1st Peter 2:24

This is what Jesus did for us in His love. It was all of us who were persecuting Him and He loved us to the point of giving His life so that we would be set free to have life. The same thing is expressed in "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*." John 15:13

Stand in Love

"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls." We were apart from God, but now, through Jesus, we have returned to God. In the same way, I believe husbands and wives and even church bodies who are opposing the Word of God, are going to be turned back to the truth. They will turn to the light of the good news of Jesus and the fullness of the power of the Spirit of God in these days, as we stand in love on what we know to be true.

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the Word be won by the conversation [way of life] *of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation* [way of life] *coupled with fear* [reverence]." 1st Peter 3:1-2. We see that a wife can win her husband to the Lord by living the Christian life without saying anything to him (simply by her godly way of life, not preaching to him). The husband will behold her behavior. He will watch and observe. Then he will say, "There is something here that I need. There is something more." As he sees his wife loving, honoring and respecting him as to the Lord, then God is free to set him free. As a wife acknowledges the Lord by calling her husband "lord" and acting accordingly (1st Peter 3:6), then God will draw the man under His authority. (See 1st Corinthians 11:1-3, 7-12.)

"Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." 1st Peter 3:7 As we love and forgive, we rejoice in the Lord and commit our cause to the Father God. We live the Christian life, not compromising His Word but living it. Then God is free to move on people's hearts.

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"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing;" 1st Peter 3:8-9 We are to pray blessings on those who are persecuting us for the Word of God. We are not to fight with them.

"Knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile (deceit); *Let him eschew* (hate) *evil and do good; let him seek peace and ensure* (pursue) *it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and His ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"* 1st Peter 3:9-13

Be Not Afraid

When people are being persecuted for the Word of God, they often think they will be harmed because of the threat from the enemy through others, like, "I will hurt you. I will leave you. I will take everything we have and leave."

*"And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good. But, and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terro*r [Do not be afraid. There is no need to fear.], *neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your heart*s [Honor God in your hearts]*..."* To praise the Lord during times of persecution, in your understanding and in the Spirit (in tongues), is one of the finest things you can do… and *"be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation* (way of life) *in Christ."* 1st Peter 3:13-16

Many times people falsely accuse those who believe in the Lord. Later, after the persecutors come to the light and turn to Jesus for life, they return and say, "Would you forgive me? I was out of line about everything I told you. You were right about what you said."

"For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:" 1st Peter 3:17-18

Are we really willing to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters so that they may come to know Jesus as Lord? This is the question I want to challenge you with. Are you willing to be different for Christ?

We are not of this world anymore. We are in it, but not of it. We are different! We are God's children, not children of the devil and light and darkness do not mix. Are we willing to take the persecution that will come as we stand for Christ, persecution that will come from simply telling people the truth in love and loving them, reaching out and caring about them in Jesus? I do not mean persecution which comes because we are being ornery or obnoxious.

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part

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He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." 1st Peter 4:12-16 There is no room for compromise and there is no need to fear people. We are to look for an opportunity to help them.

Romans 12:18-21 deals with not seeking vengeance on anyone who persecutes us, but we are to — *"If thine enemy hungers, feed him;"* etc. We should expect God to open up opportunities for us to share with such people. God will give us opportunities to love the same people who are persecuting us and coming against us. Are we willing to reach out and love them? That is the point where the love of God will touch them and change their lives.

In John 16:33 Jesus said, *"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer* [fear not]*; I have overcome the world." "... And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.* 1st John 5:5

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:35-39

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