

The New Testament Church
Preparing for Persecution #4: Loving our Enemies
Pastor Paul Jehle – August 14, 2022
Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 5:3-5

I What is Persecution?

- A. Persecution is defined from the Greek; *to put to flight, drive away.... to pursue* – it is **pressure**
 - 1. Persecution is distinct from trials because it is a relentless *pursuit against your faith*
 - 2. We must remember that persecution is ultimately against Christ, not us, and it begins within
- B. Persecution is on the rise – 1 in 7 believers world-wide, suffered significant persecution in 2021
- C. God's purpose for allowing persecution is to expose the darkness and intensify our godly living
 - 1. We are blessed if persecuted for righteousness' sake; can also on unnecessary persecution
 - 2. *God uses pressure from the flesh and enemy to focus on the manifestation of His Kingdom!*
 - 3. Preparing for persecution begins with practicing to fight the pressure against spiritual growth
 - 4. When your faith is assaulted; we learn to defend it in humility, revealing our assumptions

II Loving our Enemies – Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 5:3-5

- A. Loving our Enemies
 - 1. Most people who differ with us do not hate us and are thus not really enemies
 - 2. However, real persecution does exist where hatred for Christ is taken out on believers
 - a. Remember that all persecution is focused on Christ from the flesh and devil
 - b. However, even though we know this, real persecution is not easy to endure
 - 3. Matthew 5:43-48
 - a. *You have heard that 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'*
 - b. The Rabbis added the last phrase, misapplying the text with national war (enemies)
 - c. But the ultimate motivation, even in self-defense and war, ought to be love
 - d. *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...*
 - 1. The example of forgiveness given by Rachael Denhollander in 2016 – Larry Nassar
 - 2. The example of the martyrdom of Polycarp – 155 AD
 - e. *That you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*
 - 1. Tax collectors were the most despised – betrayal of their people through cheating
 - 2. Being “perfect” means a heart after the Lord – the standard is a heart of love!
- B. God allows persecution to expose the darkness and fortify our faith
 - 1. *We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance*
 - a. Persecution is a pursuit of pressure – at times relentless
 - b. Perseverance is trusting the Lord will give the strength as needed (ex. Corrie Ten Boom)
 - 2. *And perseverance character; and character, hope.*
 - a. Perseverance works to form character – pressure scrapes us into His image
 - b. Character works hope – we know He shall give us the strength, confidence in Him
 - 3. *Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*
 - a. The goal is a greater working of God's love within us – to love when wronged
 - b. The love of God poured out to God and one another is modeled on the Cross!
 - c. *Jesus is the greatest example of love in the midst of unrighteous persecution!*