



THE PRAYER CLOSET

ENCOURAGING & EQUIPPING BELIEVERS IN PRAYER A
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ISSUE 3

PRAYER AND PERSECUTION

The Word of God declares, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 **Timothy 3:12**). The Bible is clear – the Christian can expect persecution. It is a reality for every believer in Jesus Christ. There will be opposition to our commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word. The Christian “shall” suffer persecution.

In our nation, the tide is quickly turning against Biblical Christianity. There has always been opposition and hostility to the faith. Yet, it is more aggressive and out in the open now. Believers need to be prepared for opposition like we have never known in our lives.

Because of this and since persecution is an inevitable part of following Jesus, we need to make this a part of our prayer life. Yet, how do you pray about persecution? How do you intercede concerning this issue? This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on prayer and persecution.

The Basics Of Persecution

The New Testament provides some basic truths about persecution. As believers, we need to know these things.

- *Persecution is inevitable for the Christian.*
We should not be surprised by this or caught off guard by it. Jesus Himself warns us about this inevitability, “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (**John 15:20**).
- *Satan is the driving force behind persecution.*
Satan hates Jesus Christ. He hates the church. He will actively oppose the church. He will do everything he can to attack and destroy the church. Our battle is not against flesh and blood; it is against Satan and his forces (**Ephesians 6:12**).

- *God’s grace is sufficient for what we have to endure.*
One of the most famous verses in the New Testament is **2 Corinthians 12:9**. There we have God’s great promise that His grace is sufficient. Yet, we have to read **verse 10** with it, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak I am strong.” The Bible is teaching that God’s grace is sufficient “in persecutions.” We don’t have to give in to fear or dread. God’s grace will sustain and help us.
- *We are to be faithful to Christ no matter what.*
What does Jesus desire from us? Just as He said to the church at Smyrna, He says to us, “be thou faithful unto death” (**Revelation 2:10**). No matter what the opposition, we must be faithful to Christ and His Word. We must persevere to the end, trusting Christ and making His Word known. There is no turning back; there is no backing down. We are to be faithful regardless.
- *We have the assurance of heaven and glory to encourage us.*
Jesus promised two things to the suffering Christians at Smyrna. He promises the same to all believers. First, He promised that they would have a glorious reward awaiting them, “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (**Revelation 2:10**). They would receive eternal life in heaven. They would experience all the joy, pleasure, and beauty of heaven for eternity. At the same time, they would never face the wrath of God in hell, “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (**Revelation 2:11**). The “second death” is an eternity of suffering and separation in hell. For Christians, the only suffering we will know is in this life. Our suffering is temporary. Our eternity

will be filled with joy, peace, and glory! We have to fix our eyes on these promises and keep pressing on for Jesus!

How Do I Prepare?

Since the Bible teaches that persecution is an inevitability for the Christian, the question is how do you prepare. As believers, we must be on our guard and ready. How do you prepare for this? The primary way you prepare is by prayer. The following are suggestions on how to pray in light of this truth. These are offered to help you make it a regular part of your prayer life.

- ✓ *Ask that you will have a growing, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ (John 15:4).* Jesus alone can give you the strength and help to sustain you when your faith is challenged. He has walked this path before you; He knows about persecution. He can walk with you and encourage you.
- ✓ *Plead that you will have a deep, mature understanding of the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2).* The Word of God is our anchor. This is true for our Christian lives. However, it's especially true in the midst of persecution. The persecution that many believers are facing now is the challenging of their convictions. The enemy and the world seek to pressure believers in forsaking biblical truth and accepting the lies and falsehoods of culture. We desperately need a deep, mature understanding of God's Word.
- ✓ *Pray that you will be wise as a serpent but innocent as a dove (Matthew 10:16-18).* When Jesus sent out His disciples into a hostile world, He gave them this imperative. We need the same in our world. We must be wise in dealing with the lost world. However, we must also be gentle and kind.
- ✓ *Plead for greater boldness in your witness (Acts 4:31).* In the midst of the evil and unbelief in our society, we need boldness for Jesus and His Word. We must stand for Christ and make His Word known. This boldness is not something that we work up. The Holy Spirit gives it to us. He will provide the power to stand in the face of the unbelief and opposition.
- ✓ *Ask that He will help you choose faithfulness over fear (Revelation 2:10).* We have to choose to be faithful. We cannot give in to fear. No one likes persecution. No one goes looking for persecution. Fear is a reality when opposition and

persecution come. Yet, we have to choose to be faithful. Call on the Lord to help you to choose faithfulness over fear.

- ✓ *Pray that you will show love and compassion of Jesus Christ to those who oppose/persecute you (Ephesians 6:12).* As I said earlier, our battle is not with flesh and blood. It is with Satan and his forces. It's easy to forget this. It's also easy to see people as the enemy. But, they are sinful people in need of Jesus. They are slaves to Satan who is using them and will damn them. We need to show the love and compassion of Jesus to them.
- ✓ *Plead that the Lord will help you fearlessly share the gospel (Ephesians 6:20).* The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God to change lives. God uses this message to transform people. This is the message that we must be diligent to share with others. Ask for His help to do this. Call on Him to help you.
- ✓ *Pray that you will be salt and light to all those around you (Matthew 5:13-16).* Call on the Lord to help you exercise a godly influence where God has placed you.
- ✓ *Ask that the Lord will protect you from growing weary and losing heart (Hebrews 10:38-39, 12:1).* When you look at the opposition to the faith, it's easy to lose heart. Discouragement can become a reality. When our beliefs are ridiculed and our lifestyles are maligned, it's easy to be intimidated. However, we must pray that we will not give in to discouragement. We cannot be intimidated. We cannot lose heart. We must keep on seeking the Lord, sharing His Word, and living obedient lives regardless of what society does around us.

Praying For My Church

Persecution will not only affect individual believers. It will affect the church as a whole. The church will become a target for opposition and persecution. How can we pray for our churches? I would offer the following as some suggestions on how to pray for your church in the midst of a hostile society:

- *Pray that your church will not be ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 1:16).* The gospel is the power of God to salvation. It is the message that transforms sinners. This is THE message of the church. We cannot compromise or ignore this message. The church has one

message and it is the gospel that reconciles sinners to God and to others. We must be bold and unflinching in our proclamation of the gospel.

- **Plead that your spiritual leaders will have boldness and wisdom in leading the church (Acts 4:31).** In these days, spiritual leaders need both boldness and wisdom. The Holy Spirit can grant these to them. They need boldness to stand for and declare the Word of God. They need wisdom to know how to deal with the challenges to the truth and the church.
- **Ask that your church will be determined to obey God regardless of what man says (Acts 5:29).** In our day, we must echo the words of Peter in **Acts 5:29**. We must obey God rather than man. Our first allegiance is to God and His Word. The Bible teaches us to be good citizens. The Bible commands us to be subject to those who are in power. Yet, when men call on us or demand that we disobey God, we must refuse. When they challenge us and demand that we believe something contrary to the Word of God, we must refuse. We must please God. We must obey God. Pray that your church will maintain this commitment regardless.
- **Pray that your church will be faithful to meet and encourage each other (Hebrews 10:25).** Believers need each other. We need the support and encouragement of believers. That's one of the primary reasons we gather for worship, the Word, and fellowship. It's not because we have to; it's because we need it. Ask that your church will faithfully meet and that believers will be renewed and encouraged through the worship and fellowship of the gathered church.
- **Plead for a spirit of prayer in your church (Luke 11:1).** Ask the Holy Spirit to release a spirit of prayer in your church. Prayer is the key to standing firm, to declaring and defending God's Word, and persevering in the faith. We must be humbly seeking God with all our strength.

Praying For The Persecutors

Jesus Christ Himself commands us to pray for those who persecute us, "Pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (**Matthew 5:44**). This is a matter of obedience to Christ. He desires that we pray for those who oppose the Christian faith and those who persecute Christians. This applies both on a personal and a wider level. We

are to pray for those who personally persecute us and oppose us. However, we should also pray for those in places of position and power that oppose Christ, His truth, and His church.

Yet, the question is, "How do we pray for the persecutors? How do we intercede for those who oppose the faith?" I would ask you to consider the following suggestions to incorporate this into your prayer life.

- (1) **Pray for deep, searing conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7).**
Ask that the Holy Spirit would convict them of their evil, working grief and repentance into their hearts.
- (2) **Plead that they will turn to Jesus Christ in faith (Acts 9).** Saul the persecutor became Paul the apostle. It is possible for those who oppose the faith and persecute Christians to come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray that they will see Christ for who He is, their need of Him, and that they will turn to Him in true faith.
- (3) **Pray against their evil not the evildoer (Psalm 7:9).**
We can pray for the Lord to deal with the evil of our persecutors. We can ask that their evil will be cut off and brought to an end. We are to pray for an end to their evil and that God would have mercy on them and convert them.
- (4) **Ask God to radically show up in the lives and hearts of persecutors (Psalm 139:7-12).**
Plead that they will encounter God everywhere they turn. Pray that the Word, believers, and the power of the Holy Spirit will continually confront them. Ask that He will give them no rest from His reality.
- (5) **Plead that God would forgive them (Matthew 23:34).** The Lord Jesus sets the example for us. He had been wronged, persecuted, and mistreated. Yet, He calls on God to have mercy. He prays for forgiveness. Stephen does the same (**Acts 7:60**).
- (6) **Pray that they unshakable joy and confidence of believers would bring deep conviction to them.** The Word of

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God says in **Acts 16:25**, “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” Paul and Silas had been beaten and severely mistreated. Yet, their joy and peace overflowed as they sang in the jail that night. Their joy and peace brought conviction to the man that had previously mistreated them. Ask that God would use the joy and peace of believers to bring conviction to the hearts of the persecutors.

Prayer Closet News

We hope and pray that this issue of *The Prayer Closet* is a blessing and help to you. We apologize for not putting out a newsletter for March/April. Our beloved and faithful secretary Evelyn Williams was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had to undergo a mastectomy. Praise God that all the cancer was removed! Please pray for her as she continues to recover from her surgery and goes through therapy.

We continue to work on our facility. We still need to finish the kitchen area, have bookshelves put up, and landscaping around the facility. We praise God for the progress that we have made. We pray that we can finish the work on the facility shortly.

We are also working on a variety of projects. I'm working on a variety of changes to the web site and looking into the possibility of The Prayer Closet podcast. I'm also developing materials on spiritual warfare, praying for the nations, Scripture memorization, and enhancing the church's prayer meeting.

We would greatly appreciate your prayers. Please pray for God's blessing and help on this ministry. We would also ask you to consider giving to this ministry. Your donations help us to impact people from Mississippi throughout the United States to the ends of the earth. Thank you for reading and using our newsletter! God bless you richly!

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