

GOD'S SUSTAINING POWER FOR PERSECUTED SAINTS

*1 Peter 4:12-19; Proverbs 19:2; Acts 9:16; John 16:4; 1 Thessalonians 3:3,4; 2 Timothy 3:12;
1 Peter 4:12-19*

Trials and persecutions are common to saints of God. **“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you...”** When trials, persecutions, difficulties and challenges come because of our calling and ministry, we should not see it as a **“strange thing”**. We should not think we are no longer beloved of the Lord. We are chosen and commissioned, and the favour of God is still upon our lives. The servant of God should have knowledge of persecution that might come his way. The Lord told His disciples and apostles beforehand what they would suffer so that they would not be surprised when persecutions come. He also told Paul the apostle of what he would pass through for His **“name’s sake”**.

When you know that you will be persecuted, it gives you strength and makes you dig in your feet in the ministry and be ready for what is to come. **“That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto”**. Those who want to get to heaven must be godly, holy and righteous before the Lord. Since Satan knows He will not get to heaven, he will disturb, hinder and bring affliction on pilgrims who are determined to get to heaven. Therefore, he will raise persecutions and trials. It has happened before and it is still happening; in the end of time, before Christ comes, it will be intensified.

1. THE RIGHTEOUS UNDER THE PERSECUTORS’ SCOURGE

1 Peter 4:12-18

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you”. Trials are meant to try our faith, commitment and confidence in God, His grace in us, and our stability and steadfastness in Him. We need to consider three things in the passage. One, *the righteousness of persecuted saints* (1 Peter 4:12-16; Matthew 5:10; John 15:18-20; 1 Peter 3:14-16; 2 Timothy 3:10-12; 2 Thessalonians 1:3,4). Because we are redeemed, righteous, ransomed and saved, we are now **“partakers of Christ’s sufferings”**. Yet, if anyone suffers as a Christian, **“let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf”**. It is a great privilege to be righteous. For **“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”**. If the world persecuted Christ, they will do the same to us because **“The servant is not greater than his lord.”**

Two, *His revelation about the persecutors’ state* (John 16:3; Galatians 4:29; Acts 13:45,46,50 1 Thessalonians 2:14,15; 2 Thessalonians 3:2; 2 Timothy 3:12,13). Persecutors might be religious, but they maltreat pilgrims on their way to heaven **“because they have not known the Father, nor [Christ]”**. Anyone who persecutes a Christian for righteousness’ sake is not a child of God. **“But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.”** They **“please not God, and are contrary to all men...”** They are in a state of spiritual unbelief. They do not have faith in Christ, which brings salvation, holiness and desire to get to heaven. Thus, they persecute believers. They are unreasonable, wicked and sinful.

Three, *their recompense of personal, perpetual suffering* (2 Thessalonians 1:6-9; Matthew 23:33-35; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Matthew 3:9,10; Hebrews 10:27,30,31; 2 Peter 2:17-20). Those who persecute believers will not **“escape the damnation of hell...”** Persecution comes but persecutors will be recompensed eventually. The persecution, suffering and pain of the righteous are temporal and short-lived. That is why they are called **“our light affliction”**. But the recompense, retribution, suffering of the persecutors will be in the **“mist of darkness... reserved for [them]”** forever.

2. THE RESOURCES FOR PERSECUTED SAINTS

1 Peter 4:13,14

There are rewards and resources to make you stand firm until the end if you are suffering for righteousness’ sake. They are, one, *rejoicing for being partakers of Christ’s suffering* (1 Peter 4:13; 1:6-8; 2 Corinthians 4:17, 18; 12:9,10; Acts 5:40-42; 16:25,26). Those who are suffering for

godliness are partakers of Christ's suffering and can be identified with Him. The saints who went before us had a heavier persecution but their joy was "**unspeakable and full of glory**". Thoughts of persecution make us sorrowful but when we look at Jesus Christ, the Prince of peace, it fills our heart with joy and glory. As a believer, God's grace is sufficient for you.

Two, *relying on the power of the conquering Spirit* (1 Peter 4:14; Isaiah 11:2; Acts 13:49-52; 4:23-31,33; 1:8; Romans 15:19). The fact that your life, ministry and service glorify God is enough for you to shout and sing for joy like Paul and Silas did in the prison. God still recognises the people who are joyful when there is persecution. He makes the Spirit of glory and power to rest upon them. The time of persecution is not the time to abandon the ministry. Even though there were "**threatenings**", these did not drive the apostles away from the service. Instead, it drove them into supplication and prayer, which brought greater power upon them. We will receive greater power and boldness if we allow the suffering of the moment to drive us on our knees to pray.

Three, *retaining the purpose of Christ's service* (1 Peter 4:13,14; Acts 26:16-18; 1 John 3:8,9; 2 Timothy 1:9,10; Ephesians 3:11-13; Romans 8:28). To avoid distraction, we must not forget the purpose of suffering. Being focused will make us retain the purpose of Christ's service. The purpose of our calling is "**To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God...**" Before they turn from darkness to light, they will persecute us. If we quit because of persecution, we cannot fulfil the purpose of our calling. In spite of persecution, we should be determined to fulfil God's purpose in ministry. Persecutions and trials should drive us to prayer and self-examination.

3. THE REWARDS OF PERSEVERING SERVANTS

1 Peter 4:19; Matthew 5:10-12

If you suffer persecution as a Christian leader, there are loads of rewards for you. There will be reward here, at the point of death and hereafter. You will have one, *inconceivable rewards from the Eternal* (Genesis 15:1; Deuteronomy 33:27, 29; Romans 8:17, 18; John 14:12-14; Acts 5:32; John 14:26,27). The Eternal gives Himself to us as reward. As we partake of Christ's suffering, we are also partakers of His glory, presence and power. He gives us His name and the Holy Ghost so we would keep obeying and doing His work despite persecution. He also gives us peace, which goes beyond the turbulence of our sea.

Two, *incontestable rewards on earth* (1 Samuel 24:19,20; Genesis 45:5-8; Proverbs 24:14,17-21; 25:21,22; Daniel 3:25,26,30; Mark 10:30). It was inconceivable that Saul would bless and pray for David whom he had been persecuting. Nebuchadnezzar who thrust Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fire promoted them in the province of Babylon. Your persecutors will be the ones to recommend and promote you.

Three, *incorruptible rewards in heaven* (1 Peter 1:4,5; Daniel 12:3; Luke 6:22,23; 2 Timothy 4:7,8,18; 1 Peter 5:2-4; Revelation 22:12-14). If you remain faithful on earth, you will be blessed beyond measure. Then on the other side of eternity, you will experience peace and joy, and "**receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away**." Persecution cannot destroy genuine servants of God or drive them into redundancy because they "**are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation**". No matter what you may be suffering at the moment, remain committed to the work of God and He will deliver and preserve you "**unto his heavenly kingdom**".