

Persecution every Christian's Lot.

2 Timothy 3:12, "Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

When our Lord was pleased to take upon himself the form of a servant, and to go about preaching the kingdom of God; he took all opportunities in public, and more especially in private, to caution his disciples against seeking great things for themselves, and also to forewarn them of the many distresses, afflictions and persecutions, which they must expect to endure for his name's sake. The great apostle Paul therefore, the author of this epistle, in this, as in all other things, following the steps of his blessed Master, takes particular care, among other apostolical admonitions, to warn young Timothy of the difficulties he must expect to meet with in the course of his ministry: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they who creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now, as Jannes and Jambres (two of the Egyptian magicians) withstood Moses (by working sham miracles) so do they also resist the truth; and (notwithstanding they keep up the form of religion) are men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." But, in order to keep him from sinking under their opposition, he tells him, that though God, for wise ends, permitted these false teachers, as he did the magicians, to oppose for some time, yet they should now proceed no farther: "For their folly (says he) shall be made manifest unto all men, as theirs (the Magicians) also was," when they could not stand before Moses because of the boil; for the boil was upon the Magicians, as well as upon all the Egyptians. And then, to encourage Timothy yet the more, he propounds to him his own example; "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me." And then, lest Timothy might think that this was only the particular case of Paul, says he, in the words of the text, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

The words, without considering them as they stand in relation to the context, contain an important truth, that persecution is the common lot of every godly man. This is a hard saying, How few can bear it? I trust God, in the following discourse, will enable me to make it good, by showing,

I. What it is to live godly in Christ Jesus.

II. The different kinds of persecution to which they, who live godly, are exposed.

III. Why it is, that godly men must expect to suffer persecution.

LASTLY, We shall apply the whole.

I. FIRST, Let us consider what it is to live godly in Christ Jesus.

This supposes, that we are made the righteousness of God in Christ, that we are born again, and are one with Christ by a living faith, and a vital union, even as Jesus Christ and the Father are One. Unless we are thus converted, and transformed by the renewing of our minds, we cannot properly be said to be in Christ, much less to live godly in him. To be in Christ merely by baptism, and an outward profession, is not to be in Him in the strict sense of the word: no; "They that are in Christ, are new creatures; old things are passed away, and all things are become new" in their hearts. Their life is hid with Christ in God; their souls daily feed on the invisible realities of another world. To "live godly in Christ," is to make the divine will, and not our own, the sole principle of all our thoughts, words, and actions; so that, "whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, we do all to the glory of God." Those who live godly in Christ, may not so much be said to live, as Christ to live in them: He is their Alpha and

Omega, their first and last, their beginning and end. They are led by his

Spirit, as a child is led by the hand of its father; and are willing to follow the Lamb whithersoever he leads them. They hear, know, and obey his voice. Their affections are set on things above; their hopes are full of immortality; their citizenship is in heaven. Being born again of God, they habitually live to, and daily walk with, God. They are pure in heart; and, from a principle of faith in Christ, are holy in all manner of conversation and godliness.

This is to "live godly in Christ Jesus:" and hence we may easily learn, why so few suffer persecution? Because, so few live godly in Christ Jesus. You may live formally in Christ, you may attend on outward duties; you may live morally in Christ, you may (as they term it) do no one an harm, and avoid persecution: but they "that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

2. SECONDLY, What is the meaning of the word Persecution, and how many kinds there are of it, I come now to consider.

The word Persecution, is derived from a Greek word signifying to pursue, and generally implies pursuing a person for the sake of his goodness, or God's good-will to him. The

FIRST kind of it, is that of the HEART. We have an early example of this in the wicked one Cain, who, because the Lord had respect to Abel and his offering, and not to him and his offering, was very wroth, his countenance fell, and at length he cruelly slew his envied brother. Thus the Pharisees hated and persecuted our Lord long before they laid hold on him: and our Lord mentions being inwardly hated of men, as one kind of Persecution his disciples were to undergo. This heart-enmity (if I may so term it) is the root of all other kinds of Persecution, and is, in some degree or other, to be found in the soul of every unregenerated man; and numbers are guilty of this persecution, who never have it in their power to persecute any other way. Nay, numbers would actually put in practice all other degrees of persecution, was not the name of Persecution become odious amongst mankind, and did they not hereby run the hazard of losing their reputation. Alas! how many at the great day, whom we know not now, will be convicted and condemned, that all their life harbored a secret evil-will against Zion! They may now screen it before men; but God seeth the enmity of their hearts, and will judge them as Persecutors at the great and terrible day of judgment.

SECOND degree of Persecution is that of the tongue; "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." Many, I suppose, think it no harm to shoot out arrows, even bitter words, against the disciples of the Lord: they scatter their firebrands, arrows and death, saying, "Are we not in sport?" But, however they may esteem it, in God's account evil-speaking is a high degree of Persecution. Thus Ishmael's mocking Isaac, is termed persecuting him. "Blessed are ye (says our Lord) when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my name's sake." From whence we may gather, that reviling, and speaking all manner of evil for Christ's sake, is a high degree of persecution. For "a good name, *says the wise man) is better than precious ointment," and, to many, is dearer than life itself. It is a great breach of the sixth commandment, to slander any one; but to speak evil of and slander the disciples of Christ, merely because they are his disciples, must be highly provoking in the sight of God; and such who are guilty of it (without repentance) will find that Jesus Christ will call them to an account, and punish them for all their ungodly and hard speeches in a lake of fire and brimstone. This shall be their portion to drink. The

THIRD and LAST kind of Persecution, is that which expresses itself in ACTIONS: as when wicked men separate the children of God from their company; "Blessed are ye, (says our Lord) when they shall separate you from their company:" or expose them to church-censures. "They shall put you out of their synagogues;" threatening and prohibiting them from making an open profession of his religion or worship; or interdicting ministers for preaching his word, as the high-priests threatened the apostles, and "forbad them any more to speak in the name of Jesus;" and Paul breathed out threatenings and slaughters against the disciples of the Lord: or when they call them into courts; "You shall be called before governors," says our

Lord: or when they fine, imprison, or punish them, by confiscation of goods, cruel scourging, and, lastly, death itself.

It would be impossible to enumerate in what various shapes persecution has appeared. It is a many-headed monster, cruel as the grave, insatiable as hell; and, what is worse, it generally appears under the cloak of religion. But, cruel, insatiable, and horrid as it is, they that live godly in Christ Jesus, must expect to suffer and encounter with it in all its forms.

This is what we are to make good under our next general head.

3. THIRDLY, Why is it that godly men must expect to suffer persecution? And,

FIRST, This appears from the whole tenor of our Lord's doctrine. We will begin with his divine sermon on the mount. "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." So that, if our Lord spoke truth, we are not so blessed as to have an interest in the kingdom of heaven, unless we are or have been persecuted for righteousness sake. Nay, our Lord (it is remarkable) employs three verses in this beatitude, and only one in each of the others; not only to show that it was a thing which men (as men) are unwilling to believe, but also the necessary consequence of it upon our being Christians. This is likewise evident from all those passages, wherein our Lord informs us, that he came upon the earth, "not to send peace, but a sword;" and that the father-in-law should be against the mother-in-law, and a man's foes should be those of his own household. Passages, which though confined by false prophets to the first, I am persuaded will be verified by the experience of all true Christians in this, and every age of the church. It would be endless to recount all the places, wherein our Lord forewarns his disciples, that they should be called before rulers, and thrust out of synagogues, nay, that the time would come, wherein men should think they did God service to kill them. For this reason he so frequently declared, that "unless a man forsake all that he had, and even hated life itself, he could not be his disciple." And therefore it is worthy our observation, that in the remarkable passage, wherein our Lord makes such an extensive promise to those who left all for him, he cautiously inserts persecution. "And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time; houses and brethren, and sisters and mothers, and children and lands, with persecutions; (the word is in the plural number, including all kinds of persecution) and in the world to come eternal life." He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what Christ says in all these passages, and then confess, that all who will godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

As this is proved from our Lord's doctrine, so it is no less evident from his life. Follow him from the manger to the cross, and see whether any persecution was like that which the Son of God, the Lord of glory, underwent whilst here on earth. How was he hated by wicked men? How often would that hatred have excited them to lay hold of him, had it not been for fear of the people? How was he reviled, counted and called a Blasphemer, a Wine-bibber, a Samaritan, nay, a Devil, and, in one word, had all manner of evil spoken against him falsely? What contradiction of sinners did he endure against himself? How did men separate from his company, and were ashamed to walk with him openly? Insomuch that he once said to his own disciples, "Will you also go away?" Again, How was he stoned, thrust out of the synagogues, arraigned as a deceiver of the people, a seditious and pestilent fellow, an enemy of Caesar, and as such scourged, blind-folded, spit upon, and at length condemned, and nailed to an accursed tree? Thus was the Master persecuted, thus did the Lord suffer; and the servant is not above his Master, nor the disciple above his Lord: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," says the blessed Jesus. And again, "Every man that is perfect (a true Christian) must be as his Master," or suffer as he did. For in all these things our Lord has set us an example, that we should follow his steps: and therefore, far be it that any, who live godly in Christ Jesus, should henceforward expect to escape suffering persecution.

But farther: not only our Lord's example, but the example of all the saints that ever lived, evidently demonstrates the truth of the apostle's assertion in the text. How soon was Abel made a martyr for his religion?

How was Isaac mocked by the son of the bond-woman? And what a large catalogue of suffering Old Testament saints, have we recorded in the 11th

chapter of the Hebrews! Read the Acts of the Apostles, and see how the first Christians were threatened, stoned, imprisoned, scourged, and persecuted even unto death. Examine Church History in after-ages, and you will find the murder of the innocents by Herod, was but an earnest of the innocent blood which should be shed for the sake of Jesus. Examine the experience of saints now living on earth; and, if it were possible to consult the spirits of just men made perfect, I am persuaded each would concur with the apostle in asserting, that "all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

How can it be otherwise in the very nature of things? Ever since the fall, there has been an irreconcilable enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Wicked men hat God, and therefore cannot but hate those who are like him: they hate to be reformed, and therefore must hate and persecute those, who, by a contrary behavior, testify of them, that their deeds are evil. Besides, pride of heart leads men to persecute the servants of Jesus Christ. If they commend them, they are afraid of being asked, Why do not you follow them? And therefore because they dare not imitate, though they may sometimes be even forced to approve their way, yet pride and envy make them turn persecutors. Hence it is, that as it was formerly, so it is now, and so will it be to the end of time; "He that is born after the flesh, (the natural man, does and) will persecute him that is born after the Spirit," the regenerate man. Because Christians are not of the world, but Christ hath chosen them out of the world, therefore the world will hate them. If it be objected against this doctrine, that we now live in a Christian world, and therefore must not expect such persecution as formerly; I answer, All are not Christians that are called so; and, till the heart is changed, the enmity against God (which is the root of all persecution) remains: and consequently Christians, falsely so called, will persecute as well as others. I observed therefore, in the beginning of this discourse, that Paul mentions those that had a form of religion, as persons of whom Timothy had need be chiefly aware: for, as our Lord and his apostles were mostly persecuted by their countrymen the Jews, so we must expect the like usage from the Formalists of our own nation, the Pharisees, who seem to be religious. The most horrid and barbarous persecutions have been carried on by those who have called themselves Christians; witness the days of queen Mary; and the fines, banishments and imprisonments of the children of God in the last century, and the bitter, irreconcilable hatred that appears in thousands who call themselves Christians, even in the present days wherein we live.

Persons, who argue against persecution, are not sufficiently sensible of the bitter enmity of the heart of every unregenerate man against God. For my own part, I am so far from wondering that Christians are persecuted, that I wonder our streets do not run with the blood of the saints: was mens power equal to their wills, such a horrid spectacle would soon appear. But,

Persecution is necessary in respect to the godly themselves. If we have not all manner of evil spoken of us, how can we know whether we seek only that honor which cometh from above? If we have no persecutors, how can our passive graces be kept in exercise? How can many Christian precepts be put into practice? How can we love; pray for; and do good to; those who despitefully use us? How can we overcome evil with good? In short, how can we know we love God better than life itself? Paul was sensible of all this, and therefore so positively and peremptorily asserts, that "all who live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

Not that I affirm, all are persecuted in a like degree. No: this would be contrary both to scripture and experience. But though all Christians are not really called to suffer every kind of persecution, yet all Christians are liable thereto: and notwithstanding some may live in more peaceful times of the church than others, yet all Christians, in all ages, will find by their own experience, that, whether they act in a private or public capacity, they must, in some degree or other, suffer persecution.

Here then I would pause, and, LASTLY, by way of application, exhort all persons,

FIRST, To stand a while and examine themselves. For, by what has been said, you may gather one mark, whereby you may judge whether you are Christians or not. Were you ever persecuted for righteousness sake? If not, you never yet lived godly in Christ our Lord. Whatever you may say to the contrary, the inspired apostle, in the words of the text (the truth of

which, I think, I have sufficiently proved, that all who will live godly in Him, shall suffer persecution. Not that all who are persecuted are real Christians; for many sometimes suffer, and are persecuted, on other accounts than for righteousness sake. The great question therefore is, Whether you were ever persecuted for living godly? You may boast of your great prudence and sagacity (and indeed these are excellent things) and glory because you have not run such lengths, and made yourselves so singular, and liable to such contempt, as some others have. But, alas! this is not a mark of your being of a Christian, but of a Laodicean spirit, neither how nor cold, and sit only to be spewed out of the mouth of God. That which you call prudence, is often, only cowardice, dreadful hypocrisy, pride of heart, which makes you dread contempt, and afraid to give up your reputation for God. You are ashamed of Christ and his gospel; and in all probability, was he to appear a second time upon earth, in words, as well as works, you would deny him. Awake therefore, all ye that live only formally in Christ Jesus, and no longer seek that honor which cometh of man. I do not desire to court you, but I entreat you to live godly, and fear not contempt for the sake of Jesus Christ. Beg of God to give you his Holy Spirit, that you may see through, and discover the latent hypocrisy of your hearts, and no longer deceive your own souls. Remember you cannot reconcile two irreconcilable differences, God and Mammon, the friendship of this world with the favor of God. Know you not who hath told you, that "the friendship of this world is enmity with God?" If therefore you are in friendship with the world, notwithstanding all your specious pretenses to piety, you are at enmity with God: you are only heart-hypocrites; and, "What is the hope of the hypocrite, when God shall take away his soul?" Let the words of the text sound an alarm in your ears; O let them sink deep into your hearts; "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

SECONDLY, From the words of the text, I would take occasion to speak to those, who are about to list themselves under the banner of Christ's cross. What say you? Are you resolved to live godly in Christ Jesus, notwithstanding the consequence will be, that you must suffer persecution? You are beginning to build; but have you taken our Lord's advice, to "sit down first and count the cost?" Have you well weighed with yourselves that weighty declaration, "He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me;" and again, "Unless a man forsake all that he hath he cannot be my disciple?" Perhaps some of you have great possessions; will not you go away sorrowful, if Christ should require you to sell all that you have! Others of you again may be kinsmen, or some way related, or under obligations, to the high-priests, or other great personages, who may be persecuting the church of Christ: What say you? Will you, with Moses, "rather choose to suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season?" Perhaps you may say, my friends will not oppose me. That is more than you know: in all probability your chief enemies will be those of your own household. If therefore they should oppose you, are you willing naked to follow a naked Christ? And to wander about in sheep-skins and goats-skins, in dens and caves of the earth; being afflicted, destitute, tormented, rather than not be Christ's disciples? You are now all following with zeal, as Ruth and Orpah did Naomi, and may weep under the word; but are not your tears crocodiles tears? And, when difficulties come, will you not go back from following your Lord, as Orpah departed from following Naomi? Have you really the root of grace in your hearts? Or, are you only stony-ground hearers? You receive the word with joy; but, when persecution arises because of the word, will you not be immediately offended? Be not angry with me for putting these questions to you. I am jealous over you, but it is with a godly jealousy: for, alas! how many have put their hands to the plough, and afterwards have shamefully looked back? I only deal with you, as our Lord did with the person that said, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou wilt. The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man, (says he)

hath not where to lay his head." What say you? Are you willing to endure hardness, and thereby approve yourselves good soldiers of Jesus Christ? You now come on foot out of the towns and villages to hear the word, and receive me as a messenger of God: but will you not by and by cry out, Away with him, away with him; it is not fit such a fellow should live upon the earth? Perhaps some of you, like Hazael, may say, "Are we dogs, that we

may easily discern the signs of the times. Persecutions even at the doors: the tabernacle of the Lord is already driven into the wilderness: the ark of the Lord is fallen into the unhallowed hands of uncircumcised Philistines. They have long since put us out of their synagogues, and high-priests have been calling on civil magistrates to exert their authority against the disciples of the Lord. Men in power have been breathing out threatenings: we may easily guess what will follow, imprisonment and slaughter. The storm has been gathering some time; it must break shortly. Perhaps it may fall on me first.

Brethren therefore, whether in the ministry or not, I beseech you, "pray for me," that I may never suffer justly, as an evil-doer, but only for righteousness sake. O pray that I may not deny my Lord in any wise, but that I may joyfully follow him, both to prison and to death, if he is pleased to call me to seal his truths with my blood. Be not ashamed of Christ, or of his gospel, though I should become a prisoner of the Lord. Though I am bound, the word of God will not be bound: no; an open, an effectual door is opened for preaching the everlasting gospel, and men or devils shall never be able to prevail against it. Only pray, that, whether it be in life or death, Christ may be glorified in me: then I shall rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

And now, to whom shall I address myself next?

FIFTHLY, To those, who persecute their neighbors for living godly in Christ Jesus. But, what shall I say to you? Howl and weep for the miseries that shall come upon you; for a little while the Lord permits you to ride over the heads of his people; but, by and by, death will arrest you, judgment will find you, and Jesus Christ shall put a question to you, which will strike you dumb, WHY PERSECUTED YOU ME? You may plead your laws and your canons, and pretend what you do is out of zeal for God; but God shall discover the cursed hypocrisy and serpentine enmity of your hearts, and give you over to the tormentors. It is well, if in this life God does not send some mark upon you. He pleaded the cause of Naboth, when innocently condemned for blaspheming God and the king; and our Lord sent forth his armies, and destroyed the city of those who killed the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto them. If you have a mind therefore to fill up the measure of your iniquities, go on, persecute and despise the disciples of the Lord: but know, "that for all these things, God shall bring you to judgment." Nay, those you now persecute, shall be in part your judges, and sit on the right-hand of the Majesty on high, whilst you are dragged by infernal spirits into a lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, and the smoke of your torment shall be ascending up for ever and ever. Lay down therefore, ye rebels, your arms against the most high God, and no longer persecute those who live godly in Christ Jesus. The Lord will plead, the Lord will avenge, their cause. You may be permitted to bruise their heels, yet in the end they shall bruise your accursed heads. I speak not this, as though I were afraid of you; for I know in whom I have believed: only out of pure love I warn you, and because I know not but Jesus Christ may make some of you vessels of mercy, and snatch you, even you persecutors, as fire-brands out of the fire. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even persecutors, the worst of sinners: his righteousness is sufficient for them; his Spirit is able to purify and change their hearts. He once converted Saul: may the same God magnify his power, in converting all those who are causing the godly in Christ Jesus, as much as in them lies, to suffer persecution! The Lord be with you all. Amen.