

“Why Obedience Is the Right Response to Persecution”
(Psalm 119:49-56)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

If we keep the law –

As saw this morning,

If we stand up and stand out –

We will be persecuted.

What should we do when we're persecuted?

Persecution means someone doesn't like what we do

And so does something bad to us.

How should we respond to this?

Should we retaliate?

When someone does something bad to me,

Does that mean I can do something bad back?

No. If I do, then I'm no better.

We're supposed to be better,

We're called to be like Jesus.

What did He do when He was persecuted?

When He was on the cross,

He prayed for those who condemned Him,

He prayed for those who crucified Him.

Stephen, following His example,
 Did the same:
 When he was being stoned,
 He prayed for those throwing the stones.
 You are not to return evil for evil,
 But give a blessing instead (1 Pet. 3:9).

B. Preview.

This evening's passage
 Helps us to understand more clearly
 That this is what the Lord wants us to do,
 And gives us some godly counsel on how to do it.

II. Sermon.

A. It's clear from what he writes

That the psalmist is being persecuted.
 What does he do?

1. First, he prays that the Lord

Would remember His promises.

“Remember the word to Your servant, in which You have made me hope” (v. 49).

The “Word” here appears to be a word of promise.

That's what the godly often prayed

That the Lord would remember –

Not because He forgot what He promised,
But as a means of pleading that promise before Him.

This is really the only basis
For any hope that anything
Will turn out well for us.

2. This is the only comfort you can look to:

Remembering God's promises,
And knowing He will be faithful to keep them.
"This is my comfort in my affliction, that Your word has revived me" (v. 50).

This can revive your soul,
Especially when you consider
That God is ultimately the reason
You're facing this affliction –
Not that He created the evil behind it,
But that He's using the evil for His good purposes.

What is His purpose?
To discipline you.
Discipline isn't always correction for sin,
Sometimes it's simply to teach you something –
To show you how weak you are,
How much sin you have yet to conquer,

To get you to rely more on God's strength,
To walk more closely with Him.

The problem comes when you don't understand this,
And begin to resent the trial,
To the point where you sin.
If that happens,
The Lord will turn up the heat,
Until you repent (Heb. 12:12-13).

But understanding His promise –
That He has brought it,
That He is in control of it,
That He means it for your good,
And that He will bring good out of it –
Can revive and refresh you
In that hope that He will bring about
The good He intends.

B. And so as the psalmist considers

The trial he is going through –
“The arrogant utterly deride me” (v. 51)
What does he do?

1. He purposes that he won't let

What they're doing

Cause him to sin.

"Yet I do not turn aside from Your law" (v. 51).

He's tempted to sin –

He's tempted to become angry,

Or to get even –

But he knows that to do so,

Not to turn the other cheek,

Will only bring more difficulty.

The Lord is teaching him patience under difficulty,

And so he sets his heart to honor Him.

2. He remembers what God said to do,

And he does it,

"I have remembered Your ordinances from of old, O LORD, and comfort myself" (v. 52).

He comforts himself in the fact

That God will work it together for good

If he will only patiently endure.

James writes, "As an example, brethren, of suffering and patience, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and *is* merciful" (James 5:10-11).

C. But what about his attitude

Towards those who are persecuting him?

Now that's an interesting question.

He says, "Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law" (v. 53).

When you're under persecution

You should draw comfort from God's promises

And purpose to obey God

And not to sin,

Knowing that He will work it together

For your good ().

But what should be your attitude

Towards those who persecute you?

Is the Lord telling us through the psalmist

That it should be one of burning indignation,

Which literally means,

A burning and raging anger?

David wrote on one occasion,

"Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

I hate them with the utmost hatred,

They have become my enemies" ().

On the other hand,
Jesus tells us to love our enemies,
To bless those who persecute you,
And to do good to those hate you ().

I think we're all familiar
With this dilemma.
How can you see someone do something evil,
Something that dishonors God,
Something He hates,
And not feel something of this anger?
How can we see the things
Our leaders and the people of this nation do
And not be outraged?

If you love God
And His honor,
You can't see these things
And not get angry –
Not be jealous for His glory.

But how can you be angry
And hate them,
While at the same time

Love them and desire their good?

The answer has to do with perspective –

You can't love and hate them

At the same time

And in the same relationship –

That would be a contradiction –

But you can love and hate them

At the same time

In different relationships.

One example of what I mean

Can be seen in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Cults have difficulty with this teaching

Because they don't believe

There can be one God

And three persons who are God

At the same time.

Now it's true

That He can't be one God

And three Gods at the same time;

And He can't be one person

And three persons at the same time;

But He can be one God

And three persons at the same time.

He is one in one relationship,

And three in another.

The point here is

That we can hate the wicked from one perspective

While loving them from another.

From the perspective

Of their hatred and offenses against God,

We can hate them.

Notice what the psalmist says:

“Burning indignation has seized me *because of the wicked, who forsake Your law,*”

He looks at what they have done to him

From the standpoint of how they have treated God,

And he is angry.

In the same way, David writes,

“Do I not hate those *who hate You, O Lord?*

And do I not *loathe those who rise up against You?*”

His anger and hatred comes

From the fact that they’re dishonoring God –

The One who is perfect,

The One he loves,
Because He is worthy of so much better.

So on the one hand,
We can experience anger and hatred
Because of their dishonoring our Lord.

But on the other hand,
We can still love them –
By showing mercy,
By not retaliating,
But instead seeking their good,
Especially their repentance,
Knowing that if they don't repent,
God will even the balances.

And remember,
God doesn't expect us to love our enemies
In the sense of being enamored with them,
But that we do good to them.

John Gill writes this in his commentary,

“Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate You?....

Wicked men are haters of God; of his word, both law and Gospel; of his ordinances, ways, and worship; of his people, cause, and interest; and therefore good men hate them: not as men, as the creatures of God, and as their fellow creatures, whom they are taught by the Gospel to love, to do good unto, and pray

for; but as haters of God, and because they are so; not their persons, but their works; and for the truth of this the omniscient God is appealed unto;

and am not I grieved with those that rise up against You? as wicked men do, in their hearts, in their words, and in their actions. They rebel against God, and contend with him, which is folly and madness; and this is grieving to good men, because of their insolence and impudence, the ruin and destruction they expose themselves to, and the dishonour done to God: and this arises from their great love and strong affection for him, not being able to bear such behaviour to him; as a man is filled with grief and indignation when another rises up against his father or his friend.”

Again, it's a matter of perspective:

This also explains how

God may take pleasure in the death of wicked,

And how He doesn't take pleasure in their death.

He is pleased when a wicked man

Is justly punished for his crimes

For all eternity –

But He is not pleased

When a creature made in His image

Is destroyed for all eternity,

When you consider that suffering

In isolation from His justice.

We all have a similar reaction

When a murderer is executed for murder –

A satisfaction that justice is served –

But compassion when we see

The man before his execution
Terrified and weeping
And proclaiming his deep sorrow
Over what he's done.

So how should you view
Those who persecute you?

Zeal for God's glory
And love for His name
Dictate that you be angry
And even hate the wicked.

But at the same time,
You are to experience a measure of compassion
Because he or she is a creature
Made in His image
And capable of redemption,
Who will be destroyed
If they don't repent.

Perhaps this can help us make sense
Out of what we feel
When confronted with all the evil
We see in this world

And what we experience personally.

D. The fact that there are so many

Who disregard and dishonor God

Fortifies the psalmist's resolve to honor Him,

“Your statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage” (v. 54).

1. And what honors Him?

When we love His laws

As He loves them.

When we make them not only our meditation,

But our songs –

When we delight in them.

2. He is honored when we have regard

For the glory of His name

Whether during the day,

When we're around others,

Or at night, when we're alone before Him.

“O LORD, I remember Your name in the night, and keep Your law” (v. 55).

3. And He is honored

When we treasure obedience to His commandments

Above everything else,

“This has become mine, that I observe Your precepts” (v. 56).

4. What is the difference

Between the righteous and the wicked,
Between the believe and the unbeliever,
Between those going to heaven and to hell?

It's not that the believer
Believes what God says is true,
The unconverted and demons can do that ().

It's that the believer loves and obeys God,
Because he or she wants to honor Him,
Where the unbeliever doesn't.

5. And so what should your response be to persecution?

It should motivate you
To obey the Lord more carefully
So that you can draw comfort
From His promises
That He will work it together for your good.

And though you should be angry
Because of what your persecutor
Is doing to dishonor God,
You should at the same time
Obey the Lord who tells you

To feel compassion for a fellow human being
And try to reach out to him with the Gospel,
Because he will be destroyed
If he doesn't repent and trust in Christ. Amen.

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