

The STRONG Christian 4

Strong in Persecution: In the Last Days.

I am claiming that the STRONG Christian is strong in Revelation, Undefined Conscience and Prayer Warfare. The Strong Christian has to be able to handle persecution. Persecution means that we are coming under attack. In the NT the word giving the root meaning of persecution is 'dioko', which means to pursue or apply pressure in a direction. This can be positive and negative. The word 'dioko' is used by Paul in Philippians 3:14, when he says that he pursues (presses in for) the goal of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He is applying himself to this pursuit or goal. It can also be used to mean that we are pursued and this is our meaning of persecution. We also have the related English word 'prosecute' which means to follow up or pursue which need not be with evil intent. So the persecuted person is the person being pursued in order to bring them down.

Persecution in the OT.

The Psalms give examples of persecution. In Psalm 35, the Psalmist seeks vindication against his enemies. Again in Psalm 70, David seeks relief from his adversaries. Because of the spirit dynamic behind persecution we recognise that our warfare is not against flesh and blood (people) but against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies (Eph 6:12).

Jesus warns of persecution.

If persecution was a part of the life of Jesus it will be a part of the Christian's life. As Jesus said, 'a disciple is not above his master. If they persecuted me they will persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also' (John 15:20). In fact, Jesus goes on to say that whoever kills you will think that they are doing God a service (John 16:2). In John's interpretation this is because such people do not know the Truth.

Jesus claims that one is blessed when one is persecuted for doing the right thing. 'Blessed (happy) are you when men revile and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven, for that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you' (Mtt 5:11-12).

Jesus makes us aware of the place of persecution in our lives in the parable of the Sower. 'He who has no root in himself endures only for awhile, because when tribulation and persecution arise because of the Word, such a one immediately stumbles' (Mtt 13:21). The one who has the root of the Christian matter in him is a stronger Christian able to withstand the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches which choke the living Word planted in us by hearing.

Paul speaks of persecution.

After his conversion (confrontation) on the Damascus road, Paul hears from Ananias that the Lord will show him how much he must suffer for Christ's sake (Acts 9:16). Paul's response to various trials is that he is not only ready to be bound but to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13). In 2Cor 11:22-30 Paul lists 26 kinds of trials and tribulations that he endured including being whipped, stoned (Acts 14:19-20) and shipwrecked. Yet he claims that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ including tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword (Rom 8:35). In speaking of the signs of his

apostleship he says that 'we labour, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless, being persecuted (pursued) we endure, being defamed we encourage. We have been made as the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things to this day' (1Cor 4:12-13). But he claims that we have the treasure of the glory of God in earthen vessels that the extraordinary power and its demonstration may belong to God. He continues

- we are hard pressed on every side but not crushed,
- we are perplexed but not in despair,
- we are persecuted but not forsaken,
- we are struck down but not destroyed,

- we are always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (2Cor 4:7-10). Paul also explains this as the outward man perishing but the inward man being renewed daily (2Cor 4:16-18). Paul puts this in eternal perspective by continuing to say that his light affliction is working a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. So Paul handles affliction by looking at that which is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary but the things that are not seen are eternal.

Both Paul and Peter claim that we share in the sufferings of Christ. Paul says that he fills up in his flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ (Col 1:24). Peter says that we should not regard persecution (a fiery trial) as something strange happening, but that we should rejoice that we can partake in the sufferings of Christ. This means that when His glory is revealed we will be glad with great joy (1Pet 4:12-13). It is possible for us to share in the sufferings of Christ because His sufferings were not redemptive nor were they complete. Suffering is a human passion associated with our spirit struggle. Some may suffer more than others. This is an indication of their response to their struggle. Our redemption is in the Blood of Christ which has been shed as a once for all and perfect act of atonement. (This is the importance of the teaching about the Blood of Jesus.) Suffering is never redemptive. It is a sign of our personal position not a spirit truth. There is no redemption in suffering but there may be cleansing of our hearts and focussing of our energies.

Christianity seems to thrive in persecution. This is partly because we are driven into the arms of God and people can see the reality of our faith and trust in God. It has been said that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church'. For every martyr there are others who will take their place. People are attracted to real faith even in the face of death. The church is not corrupted by persecution but rather by luxury. In the Book of Revelation the persecuted saints are seen under the altar awaiting their justification before God (Rev 6:9-11). Persecution has always been a trial for Christians and will continue to be so. Paul says that all who desire to live a godly life in Jesus Christ will suffer persecution (2Tim 3:12). He says that he suffers persecution because the preaching of the Cross creates offence (Gal 5:11). He even claims that people will be circumcised in order to look like Jews and so avoid the persecution associated with the Cross of Christ (Gal 6:12).

The End Times.

The Christian is always living in the End Times. The End Times is when the warfare against evil increases. Judgement approaches and persecution increases. The powers of evil intensify their hatred and their attempt to destroy what is good. God is bringing the creation to His conclusion. For the Christian everything depends

on the appearing of Jesus Christ. The Christian life is not complete nor is our faith fully justified (proved right) until Jesus demonstrates its truth in history before all eyes. The last cry in the Bible (before the benediction) is 'Come Lord Jesus' (Rev 22:20). We walk by faith not by sight (2Cor 5:7). This means that we do not have all the answers now. But there are answers. Paul says that we know in part and we prophesy (the future) in part. That is, we are on the right track but we do not know it all. It is not intended that we know it all. 'For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am known (1Cor 13:12). So the Christian looks for the culmination of all things and the reason for persecution and tribulation will be revealed. Our task is to hang on without complete knowledge knowing that our time will come. However, scripture does outline what will happen and we need to be strong in the faith of the Lord Jesus in the company of all those who have loved His appearing (2Tim 4:8).

The Day of the Lord.

Paul says that God has appointed a Day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man Whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:31). There is a Day, a specific point in history when God will act and intervene in the history of His creation with judgement and the revealing of ultimate truth. As it says in Isaiah 2:5-22, the Day of the Lord is coming in judgement. The judgement on Israel for its apostasy and idolatry is seen as a judgement on the whole creation. 'For the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon every thing lifted up and it shall be brought low' (Is 2:12). As the covenant with Israel looked back to the day of deliverance out of Egypt, now the prophetic hope looks forward to the Day of the deliverance of God from the impact of evil and unbelief.

The Day of the Lord is taken up by Zechariah. The Lord shall stand on the Mount of Olives which shall split in two (Zech 14:4). In that Day the Lord will come with all the saints (14:5). There will be no light except by God's appointment (14:6,7). In that Day living waters shall flow from Jerusalem and the Lord's name will be one (14:8,9). The vision of holiness is expressed by coming to the Feast of Tabernacles and the engraving of the sign 'Holiness to the Lord' (14:19-21). Also the flesh of people shall dissolve while they stand on their feet and their eyes will dissolve in their sockets (14:12). This may be because of the intense heat spoken of by Peter when in the Day of God the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat (2Pet 3:12) (as in an atomic blast).

Jesus and Judgement.

In Mark 13 Jesus speaks of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which occurred under the Romans in 70 AD. Jesus says that His followers will be arrested but our defence will be by the Holy Spirit (13:11). But the gospel must first be preached to all the nations (13:10). Jesus says that, in the Day, we will be hated by all for His name's sake, but that it is he who endures to the end who will be saved (13:13). Jesus then speaks of a great tribulation (13:14-23) including false christs (messiahs), false prophets and lying wonders (13:22). Then there will be apocalyptic signs of the cataclysm at the End of the Age with the darkness of sun and moon. But the Son of Man will appear in great power and glory. Heaven and earth will pass away but the words of Jess

Christ will not pass away. The word of God is more permanent than matter. This is referred to in Rev 20:11 where no place is found for matter. But Jesus also warns that we will not know the day or the hour of these events. Cults love to give a time and place for these things. What we are to do is to discern the times and be aware of what God is doing. We are always waiting for the Lord, loving His appearing and the judgement of the sheep and the goats (Mtt 25:31-46). This is the great sorting out of good and evil.

Paul on the End Times.

In 1Thess 5:1-11, Paul speaks of the Day of the Lord which comes as a thief in the night. We are to be watchful and sober. Paul speaks of the Rapture when Christ comes on the clouds for the saints (4:16-18). We are to comfort each other with these words. In 2Thess 2 Paul speaks of the great apostasy when the son of Perdition, the man of sin, is revealed. He will exalt himself against all that is called God (2:3). The mystery of lawlessness is already at work (2:7) and its signs are lying wonders and people not receiving the love for the truth (2:10). God sends them a strong delusion that they should believe the lie (2:11). Paul also sees a personal place of deliverance for himself when he says that there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness which the Lord, as the righteous judge, will give him in that Day and not only to him but to all that love his appearing (2Tim 4:8). The Book of Revelation is all about the coming judgement of God and is a separate study. May the Lord give a deep love of the truth and of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The Place of Israel in the End Times.

Has God finished with Israel? I claim that God has not finished with Israel. In fact, it seems to me that God's dealings with the world will be by means of Israel. There is some teaching that the Church has taken over from Israel. The Church has not taken over from Israel for the Church is grafted into Israel (Rom 11:17, 19, 23, 24). The covenant of God with Israel is never broken. What happens is that the curse clauses are activated. The covenant that God made with Israel has associated with it blessings and curses. In Deut 28:1-14 there are 10 blessings. In Deut 28:15-28 are 10 curses. These curses appear to be the real source of Jewish dispersion, pogroms and anti-Semitism. See Deut 28 verses 58 to 68. I would put forward the following considerations:

1. The Jews are, and continue to be, the chosen people of God. God does not go back on His choice or calling (Rom 11:29).
2. God has not forgotten Israel. Consider the formation of modern Israel in 1948.
3. Israel is still in covenant.
4. The Church is not the new Israel. The Word of God still applies to Israel.
5. Israel is the vehicle for God's dealing with the world.
6. Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the Jews as well as the Gentiles.
7. There is no prophecy or its fulfilment without Israel.
8. The future of the world depends on what God does with Israel.
9. Not all that the modern state of Israel does is right.
10. Israel also needs to be converted to Jesus Christ.
11. Israel can bear the hostility of the world against God.
12. God's answers are political and historic dealing with specific events in a specific place.
13. God's purposes will prevail.
14. All Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26).
15. This is all new and controversial teaching.