

“Bless Those Who Persecute You”

My intention today was to preach from Romans 12:14-16. But while studying this week, I recognized that the command in Romans 12:14 deserves isolated attention. Although this is only one of the 29 imperatives that form an **“Ethical Description of the Christian Life,”** it powerfully demonstrates the transformation of Romans 12:2 in the life of the Believer.

(Romans 12:14) "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

Blessing your persecutors distinguishes true believers from non-believers. Christian Character is proven when we respond to pressure and persecution in a manner that demonstrates Christ's presence in us. Jesus emphasized this teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Notice the different emphasis in Matthew's account and the account in Luke's gospel. Both demonstrated that followers of Christ will go beyond the normal graces that are demonstrated in human relationships. Christians will do more than just love those who love them first, or treat kindly those who treat them with kindness. Christian love is demonstrated in loving even those who mistreat you.

(Matthew 5:43-48) " *“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

(Luke 6:32-35) " *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.”*

Luke's gospel puts it this way, If you love those who love you, how is this different from the unsaved?

If you do good to those who are good to you, how is this different?

If you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, how is this different?

The mark of Christian faith is demonstrated in loving those who mistreat you.

Blessing your Persecutors is for all of us, not just Christian martyrs. While few of us will ever be persecuted to the point of death, ALL OF US experience the pain of being mistreated, even persecuted because of our faith. This can happen at the hands of non-believers. Sad to say, it can also happen at the hands of other Christians who are not living according to the Spirit!

IF you live a righteous life, then EXPECT

- Relatives who **condemn** us
- Students who **insult** us
- Teachers who **mock** us
- Coworkers who **laugh** at us
- A secular society that is **opposed** to us
- Politicians who are attempting to **silence** us

Our nation is already entering the ranks of those that persecute the church.

Hate Crimes legislation. Passed the House last week, ashamedly attached to the huge defense authorization bill. US Rep Frank Lobiando voted in favor of the Defense bill, rather than oppose it and the Hate Crimes legislation attached.

Chaplains cannot pray in Jesus name.

Crosses are banned. (Mojave cemetery - cross standing for 70 years, now a Supreme court case)

Students ordered not to pray.

God's judgement has already come!

It will only grow more difficult as the time of Christ's return draws near!

I. **The Meaning of Blessing Your Persecutors**

A. "Speak well of those who persecute you"

1. **εὐλογέω**
2. Repeated twice.
3. Instead of desiring harm or judgment, our heart's desire is for their good.

B. Persecute

1. **διώκω** 45 x in NT
2. "To pursue, chase after"
3. MOST OFTEN, persecute.
4. Matthew 5:43-48
5. Luke 6:32-35

6. **This may be ANY FORM of persecution for righteousness, even when it comes from another Christian!**

- C. "Do not curse"
 - 1. It was common in the synagogues of Jesus day to hear a "blessing" and a "cursing." (NAC, Rom 12:14, footnotes)
 - 2. **Paul's words are stronger than just pretending that the persecution does not hurt. It is a willful choice to respond to the persecution with blessing!**

II. The Unnaturalness of Blessing Your Persecutors

- A. Nikita Krushev wrote "We don't follow the policy suggested in the gospels that if your enemy strikes you, turn the other cheek. Rather, we believe that if someone strikes you, you should tear off their head" (The Memoirs of Nikita Krushev, vol 3)
- B. Jesus was REVOLUTIONARY in his teaching! The natural response is to hurt those who hurt you. Jesus teaches the opposite. We are to desire that God's blessing would touch them. This does not mean that we desire God to bless their wickedness, but rather that they would turn from their wickedness and experience His grace.
- C. The natural reaction is like CAIN.
- D. (Matthew 15:17-19) *"But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander."*

III. The Example of Blessing Your Persecutors

- A. Jesus is the supreme example of blessing those who persecute you.
 - 1. (Luke 23:34) *"Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots."*
 - 2. (1 Peter 2:23) *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*
- B. Following the example of the Savior, Stephen forgave his murderers at the moment of his death. (Acts 7:59-60) *"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep."*
- C. John Huss was a Reformer who preached the gospel and warned against the sinfulness of the Catholic church and its leaders. As he was burned at the

stake, he cried out "Lord, of thy unspeakable mercies, forgive my enemies. Thou knowest they have falsely accused me on the testimony of false witnesses. Yet O Thou all merciful God, I beseech the, lay not this sin to their charge" (Harpers Magazine, Vol 17)

- D. Corrie Ten Boom, a Nazi concentration camp survivor told of a life changing encounter after the war ended. In an article titled "I'm Still Learning to Forgive" (Guideposts, 1972), she wrote...

It was in a church in Munich that I saw him, a balding heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. ...

And that's when I saw him, "You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk," he was saying. "I was a guard in there." No, he did not remember me.

"But since that time," he went on, "I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein, ..." his hand came out, ... "will you forgive me?"

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there, hand held out, but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

"I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!"

For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.

This is the character of Christ demonstrated in a person's life.

IV. The Reason we can Bless our Persecutors

- A. God is Sovereign
- B. Persecution conforms us to the image of Christ. (1 Peter 2:21) *"To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."*
- C. Persecution is God's refining fire for the Church. (1 Peter 5:10) *"And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast."*

- D. Persecution advances the gospel of Christ.
1. (Acts 8:1) *"On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria."*
 2. (Acts 8:4) *"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."*
- E. Persecution builds patience. (Romans 5:3) *"Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;"*
- F. Those who suffer will be rewarded.
1. (Matthew 5:46) *"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"*
 2. (Romans 8:17) *"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."*
- G. Blessing those who persecute works much better!!!!
1. (Romans 12:20) *"On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.""*
 2. (Proverbs 25:21-22) *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*
 3. Hear what Abraham Lincoln said when he was being criticized for his **gracious attitude toward his opponents**. *"Why do you try to make friends with them?" a colleague asked. "You should destroy them!"* To which the President gently replied, *"Am I not destroying my enemies when I make them my friends?"*

There will always be those who persecute you
There will always be those who oppose you
There will always be those who make your life difficult.
Love them. Pray for them. Bless them.
It demonstrates Christ's presence in you.