

# How To Handle Hostility

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It has been said that if half the people got genuinely converted to Jesus Christ, the other half would get fighting mad.

In view of what we are experiencing here in America, it takes fewer than half to arouse the hostility of those who are leading the progressive moral and cultural decline and to mobilize them for war. Just the perception that Christians might become influential enough to threaten popular sins is enough to excite their hostility. In fact, even the current level of Christian influence has activated their hatred, triggering an outpouring of the familiar code words: *intolerance, discrimination, hate*.

Once regarded as "God-fearing solid citizens," devout Christians are now being maligned as a threat to the new "American way." Why? Because they are *the* major obstacle in the way of the current radical and reckless sexual revolution. This is the *real* reason why they have become the target of the godless elite who dominate much of the media, academia, the arts and entertainment, civil government, and some corporations. Hostile words are being followed by overt actions aimed at removing the obstacle.

Of course, the *real* reason for these hostile actions is usually not the *stated* reason. So far, believers are not being prosecuted, fined, punished, and removed from positions and employment on the charge that they are Christians. Even during the Imperial Roman persecutions, the overt charges against believers were that they were cannibals, enemies of mankind and haters of the human race and seditious, among other falsehoods.

Today the ostensible, stated charge against believers is discrimination out of hate and intolerance, especially in their biblically informed moral opposition to homosexual relationships, behavior, and acts.

"Discrimination" has become the effective "weapon of choice," legal and otherwise, to malign and criminalize believers. Proper discrimination *between* right and wrong behavior has become viewed exclusively as discrimination *against* the person.

## A Faulty Premise.

This charge against believers is based on a faulty premise that has led "logically" to a faulty conclusion. When the conclusion is obviously wrong to thoughtful people, reason demands a critical examination of its starting premise. How does opposition to a behavior become defined as a criminal act motivated by hate?

The faulty premise is that *homosexuality is genetically determined*. Although this is the premise, it is not the driving force. The driving force is radical sexual activism. This activism has seized upon this premise as its rationale.

The first assumption that flows necessarily from this premise is that *the person and the behavior are inseparable*. If the person and the behavior are assumed to be inseparable, the next link in the chain of assumptions is that *opposition to the behavior is ipso facto opposition to the person as a person*. The next assumption follows logically: because opposition to the person as a person is hate, *opposition to the behavior must also be hate*. Finally, because hate is an offense, *whoever commits the offense is an offender and should be regarded and treated as such*.

Thus a new class of "criminals" is created: pastors, priests, deacons, Sunday School teachers, Christians in government, business and the professions.

## The State Theology.

Atheism is becoming the *de facto* (if not *de jure*) established theology of the state. Atheism is not the *absence* of theology; it is a statement and a belief about God. *That* makes it a theology.

Here is the rationale of the secular state theology: If there is no God (if God is removed from consideration), then biblically informed beliefs and conscience convictions (1) are merely the superstitions of religious conditioning, (2) have no objective reality or validity that merits legal protection, and (3) can and should be "corrected" by "re-education." The aim is to "rehabilitate" believers, even by force of law if necessary.

This is an outright rejection of the most fundamental principle established by the American founders. In his essay, "Memorial And Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments," James Madison, "father of The Constitution," emphasized that freedom in the exercise of one's conscience is an inalienable right toward men and an inalienable duty toward the Creator. He stated, "This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society." He continued, "Conscience is the most sacred of all property." [The citizen] "has property of peculiar value in his religious opinion, and in the free communication of them."

Accordingly, there is a sign on the door of every person's conscience that says to government: "Keep Out." This is to protect established conscience convictions, of course, not merely transient personal opinions.

So then, establishing laws and penalties that *pressure* people to violate their conscience is tyranny. Even more so is *punishing* people for their moral integrity in remaining true to their conscience. Worst of all, *forcing* people to violate their conscience is nothing less than *the rape of their souls!*

This "progressivism" involves the rejection of the preface of the Declaration Of Independence. In his "Speech On The Dred Scott Decision," Abraham Lincoln said, "The assertion that 'all men are created equal' was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration, not for that, but for future use. Its authors meant it to be ... a stumbling block to those who in after times might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism. They knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should reappear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack." ("Speech At Springfield, Illinois," June 26, 1857).

When God is removed from people's thinking, the foundation of liberty is gone and freedom falls apart.

Instead of being a safe haven where people are guaranteed the right to live their lives according to the dictates of their conscience, the current America is willing to use government authority to trample the consciences of believers, criminalize them by the specious and vacuous charge of "discrimination," ruin their livelihoods by severe penalties, and destroy their institutions. Churches and ministers will likely be their next target.

"Christophobia" is definitely "in" and advancing like a juggernaut.

### An Old Hatred.

Hostility toward believers is not new. People who are faithful to God and His word have always met with hostility in various ways and to varying degrees. It started when Cain killed Abel (Genesis 4:8). "And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). This was the cause of the mortal enmity then and it has been its cause ever since.

Before the Noachian flood, when "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" and "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5), Noah stood courageously as "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). The Scriptures do not tell us how the people reacted. Noah's words did not pose an immediate threat to their corrupt and violent lifestyles, and the big "box" that he and his family were building was merely a curiosity and likely a subject of jokes and jeers.

Likewise, Abraham was no threat to the paganism of the ancient Canaanites. So far as they were concerned, he and his family were only sojourners in the land, worshiping their own "god."

However, it was completely different with Moses and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who had recently come out of Egypt. Plagues. The crossing of the Red Sea on dry ground. Sinai. The voice of God. The Law. The Ten Commandments. Now *that* got the attention of the pagan idolaters. Even forty years later it was still stamped on the minds of the Canaanites, who were under the sentence of divine judgment by the hand of the people of the *I AM*. In Jericho, Rahab said to Joshua's spies, "The terror of you has fallen on us ... For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt" (Joshua 2:9, 10).

Instead of repenting, the pagans reacted with hostility. When they could not defeat the people of God by force, they did so by corrupting them with idolatry. Apostasy, subjugation, repentance, restoration — this was Israel's cycle during the times of the judges.

The hostility of the nations continued. When David was king of Israel, he had to deal with persecutors continually. Israel's enemies were David's enemies because they had made themselves the enemies of God and His holy law.

The Psalms contain many prayers of David for deliverance from his enemies. Here are two examples:

"O LORD my God, in You I put my trust; save me from all those who persecute me" (Psalm 7:1).

"Deliver me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me" (Psalm 31:15).

The ancient Israelites themselves persecuted their own prophets. We need think of Jeremiah and what he endured at the hands of the rulers of Judah and their apostate religious accomplices.

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your fathers' guilt" (Matthew 23:29 - 32).

Stephen echoed this before the council: "You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it" (Acts 7:51 - 53).

The author of the Epistle To The Hebrews records that many of the Old Testament prophets "had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves in the earth" (Hebrews 11:36 - 38).

The hostility of unbelievers was aroused against Jesus Himself. Jesus was persecuted even to death at the hands of unbelievers, most of them "religious."

Why do people hate the *real* Jesus? Jesus Himself told us why. He said to His unbelieving "pre-converted" half-brothers, "The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil" (John 7:7).

Jesus was (and is) a light (John 12:46) — *the* light of the world (John 8:12) — and people who choose to live in spiritual and moral darkness hate the light.

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God" (John 3:19 - 21).

Another prophecy that foretold the hostility of the ungodly toward God and His Son was given a thousand years before Christ came. In Psalm 2:1 - 3 we read, "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us'."

The rebellion "against the LORD and against His Anointed [Christ]" is a rejection of God's moral authority. Unbelievers reject God's moral authority over them because they refuse to recognize that there is a Moral Governor who will judge their sins by Jesus Christ. Therefore they have agreed together to "liberate" themselves from Divine restraints by breaking and discarding them. The rest of Psalm 2 describes the consequences of their rebellion and also offers a blessing to all who will put their trust in God's Son.

So then, we see that the hostility of sinners is not new. It began when Cain murdered Abel because Cain's lifestyle was evil and Abel's was righteous. It has continued ever since for the same reason. It led to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. It raged against His disciples and the early believers. Throughout subsequent history it has ranged from slander and oppression to torture and killings. So it continues today in various forms and to varying degrees.

## Unbelief And Ignorance.

This hostility arises out of unbelief and ignorance. The ignorance is a result of the unbelief. Paul wrote, "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Timothy 1:13).

Unbelief involves a deliberate choice to ignore and forget facts that challenge unbelief. The apostle Peter affirms this. He foretold that in the last days scoffers who are following their own lusts will deliberately ignore and forget cosmogonic data that threaten their unbelief (2 Peter 3:5). Paul said that they repress and suppress the truth in their unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). As the saying goes, "There are no eyes so blind as those that refuse to see."

## A Moral Problem

The values and lifestyle of people who truly know and follow Jesus Christ are contrary to the vain values and licentious lifestyles of people who follow the desires of this age. Believers are not a quaint subculture; rather, they are a dynamic *counterculture* that confronts and confutes the self-centered presuppositions of a secular society at the point of its idolatries and adulteries. That is why it arouses the hostility of this present age.

The psalmist wrote, "The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor" (Psalm 10:2). "The wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow on the string, that they may shoot secretly at the upright in heart" (Psalm 11:2). "The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth" (Psalm 37:12). "The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to slay him" (Psalm 37:32).

"They hate the one who rebukes in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks uprightly" (Amos 5:10).

We remember that Jesus said, "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20).

Referring to people who live in "licentiousness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries," the apostle Peter said, "they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Peter 4:3 - 5).

Sometimes the worst hostility arises out of mistaken religious zeal and fervor. Throughout the centuries misguided and misdirected religious passion has been the source and driving force of severe persecution. Saul of Tarsus (Paul) is a prime example of this. Before Jesus Christ arrested him he literally breathed threats and murder against Christ's disciples (Acts 9:1).

Religiously driven violence is with us today. Jesus said to His disciples, "The time is coming when whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2, 3).

Unbelief distorts everything — thinking, feeling, speaking, acting. The will that is set in the wrong direction opposes everything coming from the right direction that gets in its way. It enlists the entire person — mind and body — in its opposition. The direct confrontation leads to a head-on collision. The problem is sin; the answer is the gospel. When the heart gets right with God, the mind and behavior straighten out.

### Forms And Levels Of Hostility

Hostility toward believers takes three basic forms on three levels: verbal, material, and physical.

Verbal persecution is mental and psychological abuse. It includes revilement, curses, lies, slander, verbally expressed rejection and ostracism, threats, intimidation.

Material persecution is the confiscation of money and property. It can be done by physical force or by the force of law (as when judges exact unjust fines and award outrageous monetary "damages").

Physical persecution is harm done directly to a person's body. It includes beatings, imprisonment, deprivation, torture, and death.

These forms of hostility have been used against believers for many centuries. They are much in use today, some even in traditionally "free" societies.

How then should believers respond to the world's hostility? The answer involves diligent discipleship in *attitude*, *aim* and *actions*.

#### Attitude.

First, we should not be surprised by the world's hostility. Jesus told us that it would happen and why.

He said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:18 - 20). By "the world" Jesus means this present selfish, sinful age.

Jesus said that the rewards of those who leave all to follow Him will come "with persecutions" (Mark 10:30).

Concerning His followers, Jesus prayed to the Father, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (John 17:14).

Jesus said that this animus against believers will be universal in a world that is in rebellion against Him and the Father. He said, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22; also Mark 13:13 and Luke 21:17). "You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). That includes even "free" nations.

The apostle John wrote, "Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13).

Also, the apostle Paul forewarned believers, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). In other words, "it goes with the territory." "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

To the young church in Thessalonica Paul wrote: "that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know" (1 Thessalonians 3:3, 4).

Jesus said, "Some have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble" (Mark 4:17). Sometimes persecution reveals the real believers.

Many of the rulers in Israel "believed" on Jesus but did not confess Him out of fear of being persecuted. "They loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God" (John 12:42, 43 NASB).

Some "Christians" today are willing to compromise the faith "that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12). The world loves "clergy" who are "tolerant" of what God does not tolerate.

So, let us "count the cost" and be prepared to "go the distance" with Christ and His elect.

Jesus said to His disciples, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him, who after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes. I say to you, fear Him!" (Luke 12:4, 5).

The reverential fear of God and His authority is a far greater motivator than the fear of the persecutor and his sword.



The risen Lord said to the church in Smyrna, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10). The faithful overcomers described in Revelation 12 "did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:10 NIV).

"Do not fret" is a three-fold command of Psalm 37. Verse 1 — do not fret because of evildoers (they shall soon be mowed down and wither). Verse 7 — do not fret because someone's wicked schemes are succeeding (rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him to act in His way and in His time). Verse 8 — do not fret (stop your anger and wrath before it causes you mental, emotional and even physical harm, and could drive you to do something wrong; the evildoers who upset you will come to a sudden end).

Psalm 37 speaks directly to us today. It is a divine prescription for good spiritual and mental health, God's antidote to anger, outrage and a sense of helpless frustration at what the ungodly are doing.

Lot "was oppressed with the filthy conduct of the wicked" in Sodom. "That righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds" (2 Peter 2:7, 8).

If we obey the words of our Lord Jesus and the instructions of the Scriptures (including Psalm 37), we can avoid Lot's self-torment and the emotional and physical harm it must have caused him.

Let's not allow the ungodly to weigh us down, make us "up tight," raise our blood pressure, cause us stress pains and rob us of sleep. Keep a bright, positive attitude. Resist and reject all negative thoughts and attitudes: anger, fear, frustration, defensiveness, self-pity, resentment. The joy of the Lord is our strength (Nehemiah 8:10), and Jesus said that no one will take our joy from us (John 16:22).

Our Lord said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). His victory is our victory.

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:19, 20).

Our attitude is reflected in our face and in our demeanor. Angry Christians are repulsive; they look ugly on TV. The fruit of the Spirit makes us attractive. When Stephen faced his persecutors, "all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15).

In the Sermon On The Mount Jesus said, "Blessed [happy] are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so

they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10 - 12). "*False*" is the key word. Suffering for foolishness is not suffering for righteousness.

Luke also records Jesus' words: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets" (Luke 6:22, 23).

Rejoice? Leap for joy? That is not our natural human reaction. However, we do it by the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, especially when we think of the reason Jesus gave us.

These words of our Lord are not idealistic and impractical. They have stood the test of time and Christian experience. They are proved to be true and real as believers through the centuries have faced being thrown to lions and burned at the stake; have stood before firing squads or had their heads cut off; have been disowned by their families and rejected by their friends.

They are willing to suffer financial loss and ruin at the hands of persecuting secular tribunals rather than allow their souls to be raped by being forced to violate their conscience and their moral integrity before God. Like the Hebrew believers who "joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods," they know that they have a better and an enduring possession for themselves in heaven (Hebrews 10:34).

Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward" (Hebrews 11:25, 26). Moses had his values correct and his priorities straight. So does every true disciple of Jesus Christ.

James wrote, "My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience" (James 5:10).

Believers who might be tempted to give in under persecution (or even the threat of it) would do well to stop and look at "the big picture," to consider things from the perspective of eternal values and our eternal destiny. The writer of The Epistle To The Hebrews urged the Jewish believers who were under pressure to forsake Christ, "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings; partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Hebrews 10:32 - 36).

"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:12, 13).

Paul wrote, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

No, Paul was not a "glutton for punishment." Rather, in all these things he experienced God's all-sufficient grace empowering and strengthening him. That gave him a pleasure and a contentment that transcended everything. His enemies could not make him unhappy; and for the same reason, neither can our enemies make us unhappy.

The apostle Peter wrote, "And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, you are blessed. 'And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled' [Isaiah 8:12]" (1 Peter 3:13, 14). "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' [Proverbs 11:31]. Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:12 -19).

### Aim.

If Satan cannot defeat us through our weaknesses, he will try to use our strengths against us. If he cannot defeat us, he will try to divert us. If he cannot stop us, he will try to push us too fast, too far, and in wrong directions.

We must direct our aim and our actions. Aiming an arrow in the wrong direction is useless, perhaps even dangerous. A near-sighted javelin thrower seldom aims in the right direction but certainly keeps the spectators awake!

Ephesians 6:12 reminds us that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. We are not fighting people; we are fighting *for* people. This is essentially a spiritual warfare and our weapons are not carnal [human, worldly] (2 Corinthians 10:4). So we must know who our true enemy is, stay focused, keep our objective in mind, and follow God's strategy laid out for us in His word. "Therefore take up the whole armor of God ... stand ... praying always" (verses 13, 18).

Jesus sent His disciples *into* a hostile world to be His witnesses *to* that hostile world. Our mission is not to defeat the world but to bring the gospel *to* the world. Our personal safety and survival are secondary to that mission. We are salt and light only because we are His seasoning and we radiate His light in word and deed.

Important as it might be to win legal and political battles, to win souls is far more important. We do both by truth and testimony. We must not win an argument at the cost of losing a soul.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

"Fix your thoughts on Jesus" (Hebrews 3:1 NIV). Consider Him!

"Therefore, since Christ suffered for us [you] in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God" (1 Peter 4:1, 2).

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Timothy 2:12).

Paul said, "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13, 14). One thing I do — not "a dozen things I dabble in."

Believers are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). This is our high and upward calling, our sure hope, our life purpose, our God-appointed destiny. We must pursue it diligently with a single heart and single focus. Our destiny far outweighs our difficulties.

Believers are in the "University Of Adversity," with its excellent workshops for building saints. They provide many practical opportunities for us to be like Jesus.

Hard pressed. Perplexed. Persecuted. Struck down. Always delivered to death.

After mentioning all the adversities and hostilities that he and others were enduring (2 Corinthians 4:7 - 11), Paul states, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inner man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things

which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (Verses 16 - 18).

"*Light afflictions*" indeed! They are "but for a moment." They "work *for us*" not against us. They produce in us and for us a weight of glory that lightens the present afflictions when compared with the eternal realities set before us.

### Actions.

Because this is a spiritual battle, we must choose our weapons, our battlefields and our tactics wisely.

Ephesians Chapter 6 tells us to "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. It names the parts of our armor and also our weapon. It commands us to put on the whole armor and to pick up the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit — the word of God. Stand. Pray always and keep awake.

It is time for immature Christians who have been living on only the "milk" of the word to "get off the bottle and into the battle." Learn how to use the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit.

### *Battlefields.*

We will examine what the Scriptures say about our tactics — how we handle hostility and respond to it. Right now let us think about our battlefields.

Some things are anchor-points, non-negotiable "givens." They are clear biblical and moral imperatives. In these things "we ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). We respectfully yet firmly refuse to yield or compromise them. On these we take our stand regardless of the consequences. They are "the hill to die on."

Also, some things are not necessarily clear biblical and moral imperatives; nevertheless, they are matters of conscience (e.g., eating certain foods, observing certain days). Because observing them is a matter of conscience for some believers, their conscience is to be respected and its integrity is to be held inviolable.

The same is true regarding how individual believers or groups of believers respond to specific challenges. For example, one believer cannot bake a cake (or make a floral arrangement, or be a photographer) for a same-sex "wedding." Another believer does not *want* to do so (and should not be *required* to do so) but *could* do so without violating his or her conscience, and might use the occasion to witness in some way. This believer should not be judged for doing so and also should not look down on the believer who cannot do so. Furthermore, the conscience of the believer who cannot bake the cake (or participate otherwise in the event) must be protected and defended by all appropriate means available.

There is a little known and seldom quoted verse in Ecclesiastes that says, "Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise; why should you destroy yourself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16).

"Super-righteous" legalism is not holiness. Presumed superior knowledge is not wisdom. Non-biblical, non-moral scruples can get a believer into unnecessary trouble, especially in times of persecution. Believers need to make sure that where they take their stand is a genuine biblical principle and not merely a legalistic rule or a personal preference. This forces us to mature our consciences by the honest and prayerful examination of our personal scruples, assumptions, and preferences in the light of The Scriptures. We must be sure that what we are willing to suffer and die for is firmly based on the Bible. Our loyalty is to Christ, to Scripture, and to the Body of Christ.

#### *Human government.*

Romans 13 tells us that believers are to be: (1) obedient citizens (verses 1 - 7); (2) loving neighbors (verses 8 - 10); and (3) pure saints (verses 11 - 14).

God is the rightful universal Sovereign and moral Governor. He governs human affairs here on earth through human government. Human government *as an institution* is an extension and application of the moral authority and governance of God. As such, it is ultimately accountable to Him. Every nation is a "nation under God."

This does not mean that every ruler or every administration of government rules by "divine right" or is even governing rightly. Human experience demonstrates otherwise. Nevertheless, even the worst dictatorships perform the essential functions of governance. Anarchy is unworkable.

In Romans 13:1 the apostle Paul affirms that all human governance (authority) *as an institution* comes ultimately from God and is placed under God. For that reason we are to respect it, place ourselves under it, and obey it.

The position of the ruler represents the authority of the government. In republics and democracies governmental authority is shared in some way among the administrative, legislative, and judicial functions of government.

In highly centralized and autocratic governments, the ruler embodies and personifies the authority of the government. This has been the common form of government throughout most of human history, including the time of Christ and the early Church. The instructions of Christ and the apostles were given when Rome ruled. Even under those conditions, Jesus instructed us to "render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). Likewise, Paul instructs us, "Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor" (Romans 13:7).

In what were likely the early stages of Nero's persecution of believers, Peter also instructs us, "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men — as free, yet not using your liberty as a cloke for vice, but as servants of God. Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:11 - 17).

Whatever one might think of the *person* of the ruler, we are to honor the *position* that the ruler holds and also respect the person holding the position. Above all, we are to fear God.

As a general principle, obedience to a law that seems to be unwise and/or unfair is better than disobedience to law *per se*. In such cases we can work within the law and, if possible, to change the law. Civil disobedience is justified, even required, only when obedience to an unjust law violates a stated command of God and/or a clear higher moral obligation (not merely a transient personal opinion). In that case we are bound by a biblically informed conscience to obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29), even if it necessarily leads us reluctantly to peaceful civil disobedience.

As citizens, we do have civil rights and civil responsibilities, particularly if we live in a nation that recognizes our civil rights. We can and must make a difference in society.

So what can we do? First, pray. The apostle Paul said, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and giving of thanks be made for everyone — for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness [reverence]" (1 Timothy 2:1, 2 NIV).

This message is clear. Pray for all who are in authority over us. We are to pray that those who are in government will not distress us or oppress our consciences but leave us in peace to live our Christian lives.

Pray that God's will shall be done in the nation. The prophet Daniel affirmed that God "changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings" (Daniel 2:21). Daniel reminded King Nebuchadnezzar that "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses" (Daniel 4:25).

Pray in faith; trust God; rest in His sovereignty.

*After* we pray, there is much that we can do. We can participate in the political process. We can stay informed and inform others. We can contact our elected officials to let them

know where we stand. We can support wholesome laws and just causes. We can speak out when evil insinuates itself into public life and policy.

Finally, *vote!* This privilege was won on many battlefields. It should not be regarded lightly. Voting is a duty of Christian citizenship. If all believers eligible to do so actually registered and voted, what might the result be?

Support and vote for candidates for office who will uphold right principles. We must not vote for candidates who do not acknowledge God. *They will be our persecutors.*

We must also be wise stewards of our finances, especially in times of political and economic uncertainty.

At all times — and especially during election years — no matter what else is at stake, the integrity of our consciences before God must be the deciding issue for all believers, *no matter what our party affiliation might be.* The first consideration must be our loyalty to our Lord. This principle goes beyond politics and beyond our pocketbook. Believers must not vote their "pocketbook" above *God's Book!*

*Our words.*

In all of this we must maintain our Christian witness, always behaving in a Christ-like manner. Jesus did not "cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Isaiah 42:2; Matthew 12:19). If we adopt the world's methods of bringing about social change, we will be perceived as just another pressure group.

In everything, we must stay focused on the world's greatest need and our primary mission and message — the gospel.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44; also Luke 6:27, 28).

In his letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul echoed these words of the Master. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14).

It has been said, "Love your enemies; it will drive them crazy." It might also bring them to Christ.

Matthew 10:16 - 22 records Jesus' instructions to His disciples regarding how they were to handle hostility and persecution, particularly their words before persecuting authorities. His words are directly applicable to believers in all generations and in all circumstances.



"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. And you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you. Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."

Our Lord's words are recorded also Mark 13:9 - 13; Luke 21:12 - 19. So, "In patience possess your souls" (Luke 12:19).

The apostle Peter said, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15 NIV). He also said, "Do not repay evil for evil or insult for insult, but with blessing" (1 Peter 3:9 NIV).

Paul set a good example. He said, "When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world" (1 Corinthians 4:12, 13 NIV). To answer kindly ("entreat") means to appeal to reason. Present the facts; set the record straight; clear up misunderstandings; persuade kindly; conciliate.

Peter instructs us, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil" (1 Peter 3:15 - 17).

### *Tactics.*

Some ask, "Why don't Christians stand up and fight?" This question shows a lack of understanding of believers' principles and how those principles guide our "tactics" — how we respond to persecution and to our persecutors.

Believers do not "get into the ring" and fight with sinners on their turf, on their terms, and with their weapons. If we do, we forfeit the "high ground." The enemies of Christ are skilled at ideological combat. They know how to manipulate the issue so that we would be perceived as just another "pressure group." They would bring in "religious leaders" who would offer an opposing position and in this way make the issue appear as merely an unimportant and irrelevant controversy between two groups of "Christians."

Remember, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood" (Ephesians 6:4). We are not fighting people. We are fighting *for* people, and "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [human, worldly]" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Jesus Christ is our example. "When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Likewise, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to [God's] wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Some things we just have to leave up to God's judgment.

"It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you" (2 Thessalonians 1:6 and context).

"He who touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8). God is very sensitive to what people do to believers. Anyone who hurts us pokes his finger in God's eye.

"No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that accuses in judgment you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their vindication is from Me," declares the LORD" (Isaiah 54:17 NASB).

When believers feel the sting of hostility, it is easy to respond in the same way. But Christians should never be the ones who charge the atmosphere, engage in sarcasm, or make "catty" remarks. When we do, we encounter the world on its own terms, use its weapons, and fight on its battlefields and by its rules. We might win "points" and arguments that way, but we will seldom if ever win people to Christ.

Believers must stand on biblical grounds, use biblical means, and follow biblical rules. Paul put it this way: "A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Timothy 2:24, 26).

We do not have to conquer this age. Jesus Christ has already done that. He announced: "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The world must not see in us a reflection of itself. Instead, we must show them Jesus, our victorious Savior and Lord. We do this by something they can neither fight nor outlaw — *love*.

### *Self-defense.*

There are some common sense, legal, and biblically appropriate actions that believers *can* take to defend and protect ourselves, our families, and one another.

As was mentioned earlier, we can stay informed and inform others. We can speak out when evil insinuates itself into public life and public policy, remonstrating appropriately and with grace. We can contact our elected officials and let them know where we stand on the issues. We can join good common causes and support positive common action, doing so wisely and in keeping with Christian principles and attitudes. We can participate in the political process and run for public office. And, of course — register and vote if possible.

We can defend ourselves legally when our civil rights are denied, or when we are charged with false "crimes." An "army" of attorneys is prepared to defend believers in the courts when needed. Many of them have joined forces in such organizations as Alliance Defending Freedom, The American Center For Law And Justice, The Becket Fund, Liberty Institute, plus other such groups and also individuals. They have won many cases and deserve our thanks, prayers and support.

If and when we are in imminent danger, we can and should wisely remove ourselves from the situation. To protect Jesus from king Herod, the angel of the Lord commanded Joseph to take Him and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until the angel told them to return (Matthew 2:13). Jesus told His disciples, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee to another" (Matthew 10:23). When Jesus knew that the Pharisees were plotting to kill him, "He withdrew from there" (Matthew 12:14, 15). He said to His disciples that when they saw the "abomination of desolation," spoken of by the prophet Daniel, those in Judea should flee to the mountains immediately (Matthew 24:15, 16 and context).

When the believers in Jerusalem were persecuted following the stoning of Stephen, "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

Later, the former persecutor, but now converted, Saul of Tarsus escaped the city of Damascus in a basket lowered from a window in the city wall (2 Corinthians 11:32, 33).

In most countries believers are not under the immediate threat of physical harm. They are relatively protected from outside harm by the military forces of the nations where they reside. That is not the case in countries where fanatical and savage militants are in control and are slaughtering believers. In such situations, the only reasonable option is to flee the immediate danger if at all possible.

In some countries believers are burned alive in their churches and are being killed in other ways by Islamic mobs, sometimes with the complicity or at least the passivity of the government. The military and the local police do not protect them. In such situations the believers themselves are faced with a serious dilemma and are divided among themselves on how to respond. Some believe that they should remain passive and allow themselves to be persecuted and martyred. Others believe that they should arm and defend themselves and their families.

Believers who arm themselves and fight are often portrayed in the media as merely one side in a "civil war," a conflict between "religious factions." The murderers and their victims become falsely perceived as moral "equals." Thus the real situation is obscured.

Whatever the situation, let us remember the words of our Lord and His holy apostles.

Remember our Lord's words in the Sermon On The Mount: "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be the sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44, 45).

At the same time, *concerning inter-personal conflicts* He also said, "But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also" (Matthew 5:39, 40; also Luke 6:29). Take charge of the situation. Offering the other cheek puts you in control. Take preemptive action. Head off the law-suit. Whatever happens, *you win*. "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37).

Paul instructs us to be "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:12 - 15). "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (verse 21).

Just before His crucifixion Jesus said to His disciples, "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). The world did not give us our joy, and it cannot take it away from us *unless we let it*.

So as Paul urged us, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16 - 18). "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! (Philippians 4:4).

Likewise Peter says that believers "are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:5 - 7).

### *Witness.*

Many times persecution has resulted in the spreading of the gospel. This happened as a result of the stoning of Stephen.

"Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1). "Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word" (verse 4).

"Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:19 - 21).

Paul wrote from prison, "But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear" (Philippians 1:12 - 14).

The persecution of believers today can likewise result in occasions and opportunities to witness for Christ and share the gospel. Just as scattering red-hot coals spreads the fire, so scattering Spirit-filled and courageous believers spreads the gospel, brings light to those who are in darkness, and advances the kingdom of God.

For this reason those who are persecuted should think first of their witness for Christ, and speak and act accordingly. God does not waste our trials and tribulations. He uses them to build character in us. He also uses them to show His grace and salvation to others.

### *Prayer And Praise.*

We have already noted God's declaration: "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," quoted from Deuteronomy 32:35 by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:19. This is the divine promise that ultimate justice will be done.

The petition for justice was a frequent prayer of the psalmist David. As was noted earlier, many of the psalms contain prayers for deliverance and protection from persecutors and oppressors. A common feature among these psalms is a plea for God's judgment on the psalmist's enemies.

These are not angry demands motivated by a desire for personal revenge. Rather, they are righteous and proper requests for justice. The psalmist was a follower of God and

he was being persecuted by the wicked. The persecutors and oppressors hated God and were *His* enemies. For that reason they hated the psalmist and were his enemies also.

There was a positive purpose in these psalms. For example, in Psalm 83:16 we read, "Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O LORD."

Other features of these psalms include expressions of trust in God, assurance, victory, and thanksgiving.

The prophet Jeremiah likewise prayed against *his* persecutors: "Let them be ashamed who persecute me, but do not let me be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom, and destroy them with double destruction!" (Jeremiah 17:18).

These prayers were made under the Old Covenant law. They were what justice required. Jesus Christ had not yet come to establish the conditions of grace and mercy by His redeeming death and victorious resurrection.

"For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

We are now in the age of grace with its opportunity for repentance, forgiveness and justification through personal faith in Jesus Christ. Now the emphasis is on bringing them to salvation by loving them and being forbearing and longsuffering in the face of their hostility as we appeal to them with the gospel.

Like Paul, we "endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory" (2 Timothy 2:10).

That is why Jesus on the cross prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). Likewise, while he was being stoned to death Stephen prayed, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60).

As Jesus commanded us to do, we love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us. In this we are sons of our Father in heaven, "for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:44, 45).

Yes, like the psalmist, we also pray for deliverance and protection from our persecutors and oppressors. We pray "that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith" (2 Thessalonians 3:2). Like the psalmist, we pray for justice. As our Lord taught us, we pray that our Father's kingdom *come* and His will *be done*. Meanwhile we pray for His harvest and for laborers in His fields.

We also "remember the prisoners as if chained with them, and those who are mistreated," since we ourselves "are in the body also" (Hebrews 13:3). We pray for them and we do what we can to secure their release and relief.

As we pray, we maintain the joy of the Lord, because the joy of the LORD is our strength (Nehemiah 8:1), and no one will take our joy from us (John 16:22). We lift up our praises continually. That is what Paul and Silas did in prison in Philippi. "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God" — and look what happened! (Acts 16:25, 26).

### Victory!

"But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them. Let those who love Your name be joyful in You. For You, O LORD, will bless the righteous; with favor You will surround him as with a shield" (Psalm 5:11, 12).

God has promised to defend and deliver those who faithfully obey Him and put their trust in Him. He has done so on many occasions and in a variety of situations.

A classic example from the Bible is the miraculous deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Afterward, king Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God" (Daniel 3:28 NIV).

Another classic example is also found in the Book of Daniel. Babylon had fallen and the land was now under the Persians. Darius the Mede was in control. The new satraps devise a scheme to get rid of Daniel. They tricked the king, forcing him under the laws of the Medes and Persians to put Daniel into the lion's den. When God delivered Daniel, the king issued a decree throughout the kingdom that everyone "must fear and reverence the God of Daniel" (Daniel 6:26, 27 NIV).

In his second letter to the church at Corinth Paul wrote, "For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us" (2 Corinthians 1:8, 9).

This does not mean that God *always* rescues believers from harm and death. Jesus said that that some would be killed (Matthew 24:9). God delivered Peter, but allowed James to be beheaded (Acts 12).

Conditions vary. Much has to do with the prayers of other believers. The church prayed faithfully for Peter's deliverance. Did they pray for James? Did they have opportunity to do so before James was beheaded?

In his epistles Paul included an earnest request that the believers pray for him. He was confident that their prayers would make a difference in what happened to him.

No matter what happens, God is sovereign in our lives. He will accomplish His will for us and make "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

As we saw in Hebrews Chapter 11, faith's "Hall Of Fame," some of the Old Testament heroes "subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Verses 33 - 35).

Still, every one of them was an overcomer, and they all stand together equally victorious.

And so, as children of God, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, let us *if necessary* "suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:17, 18)

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword — "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35 - 39).

"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57). He "always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Amen!