

FOLLOWING JESUS: (part three of a four-part study)

This segment will be devoted to the two external factors of persecution and persuasion. One stands in direct opposition to our pursuit of a Christ-like lifestyle, while the other is designed to lead us astray from that straight and narrow path. The former is a road block, while the latter is more of a detour. The apostle Paul provides us with a warning in 2 Timothy 3:12, where he writes, “Indeed, all who desire who to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” On the other hand, our Lord encourages us in a rather paradoxical manner in Matthew 5:10-12, gleaned from the Beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount –

“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The common-sense conclusion drawn from the above is that persecution will be part of the path upon which we must walk in following our Savior. We should not be surprised when it occurs (1 Peter 4:12-19), and we can actually rejoice over the fact that we are in good company, receiving a reward which will be great.

At the same time, a far more insidious form of resistance to following Christ takes place by means of persuasion. It can appear in the context of false doctrine, having its source in demonic influence; promoted by false prophets, confirmed to us by Paul and Peter, in 1 Timothy 4:1 and 2 Peter 2:1, respectively –

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons . . . But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.”

Both external factors have their source in the devil and his demon host, with a human instrument involved in their application (Matthew 7:15-23; Acts 6:9-15; 20:28-31). The solution to overcoming these negative influences is simple but rarely, if ever, easy. It demands a whole-hearted commitment to learning and living sound doctrine (Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 4:1-5). In addition, it also requires an unwavering resolve to never deviate from the path upon which Jesus has placed you in the fulfillment of God’s purpose for your life. In Matthew 7:13-14, we read, **“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”**