Persecution and a Subtle Attack on the Gospel
Romans 9:30-10:4

Revelation 12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down violently to the earth, he persecuted the woman [the nation Israel] who gave birth to the male child [the Lord Jesus Christ].”

Before anyone seriously considers following the Lord Jesus Christ, they must be willing to handle persecution. Very few believers are willing to do so; in fact, there are very few pastor-teachers today who are willing to go through what the Apostle Paul went through for the cause of Christ.

When God is able to bless a believer on earth, it is even greater than what He did for Adam and the woman in the garden. Blessing in time is parlayed into blessing in eternity because of the believer’s willingness to suffer persecution for the cause of Christ. The only way God can bless you in the devil’s world is for you to reach spiritual maturity. Therefore, the kingdom of darkness will do what it takes to stop your momentum in the spiritual life, as in Heb 10:38. We must understand the distractions we face, because there is a legitimate amount of persecution that a believer must go through if he is going to glorify God, Rom 8:17. The world is not going to recognize a believer who is doing his best to live the spiritual life, Luk 16:10-15. The world, those under the influence of human viewpoint, are not going to be winner-believers. The world did not even recognize the Lord Jesus Christ when He came, Joh 1:10. If the world did not recognize the Lord Jesus Christ, the world will not recognize His disciples.

Eph 3:10 illustrates what is involved with the subject of persecution: “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.” Imagine this new church at Ephesus where common people received the gift of salvation and began to walk in this new faith. They heard about their inheritance, liberation, power, and authority in Christ. Many of them were slaves themselves, and they embraced a message of hope and justice. However, there was one
problem—the earthly overseer of this “Christian” movement was in Rome in prison. Therefore, in his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul pauses and reverses the normal way of looking at this issue of persecution; rather than saying, “pray for my release,” or “pray that I may endure this horrible injustice,” Paul turns the issue around and says, “Don’t lose heart—persecution means glory.”

Paul spent a lot of time in prison after his conversion to Christianity, and this may have been an embarrassment or point of contention for some of the church members. Prison scares us because it restricts our physical freedom; we must constantly face the reality of our situation when we are confined. Paul is writing to the churches from prison, and he clarifies that he is not a common criminal, but a “prisoner of Christ” and is where God needs him to be. He was in prison because he spoke the truth; however, he was also imprisoned because he compromised his doctrinal convictions; he had a major setback in which he fell into reversionism. In A.D. 58, in a moment of emotional irrationality, Paul made a sentimental journey to Jerusalem, contrary to the will of God, and offered a legalistic vow in the Temple, hoping for a better reception of the Gospel among the Jews. He now takes the time in this epistle to explain (but not defend) his predicament in terms of God’s plan. He does so without complaining or even praying for an end to his imprisonment.

Paul was absolutely sure of the message that he was preaching and that the Lord had called him to be a pastor and apostle. Rather than being popular, Paul chose to be truthful. This is a choice we all must make, because we will be persecuted when we speak the truth and live in the truth. God revealed a mystery to Paul and commissioned him to preach that mystery to the world (as in Eph 2:11-16, 3:6). Paul stood up for this truth that was beyond his comprehension and was put in prison as a result of his faith. He could have preached one message to the Jews and another message to the Gentiles, and satisfied both while inciting neither one. But he recognized that the church is built on the teaching of the apostles, and that as an apostle he was required to speak the truth (Eph 2:19-20).

When the world system hates you enough, you will begin to experience persecution, Joh 15:18-20. “If the world [those under the influence of worldly viewpoint] hates you [lightly esteems your viewpoint], you know that it has hated Me before it hated you, but if you were of the world, then the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, it hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, a slave is not greater than his master, if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” The world either loves or hates; there is no neutral ground.

In Rev 12:13 we now have two eschatology’s—the eschatology of the Devil’s desperation and the eschatology of the Lord’s tactical victory; one eschatology leads into the other. Eschatology is the study of future things, the branch of theology concerning the final events of human history. The Devil’s desperation begins with his expulsion from heaven, Rev 12:9-13. Satan no longer has any access to heaven, and he falls to the earth, where he will now express all his evil. The eschatology of our Lord’s victory begins with His triumphant return to earth, Rev 19:11-16.

The Lord comes to the earth because He has a purpose in doing so. He is in control, He has the power, and He has made all the right decisions. Satan has made all the wrong decisions, and when he is tossed to the earth, he is frustrated and angry, and he “pulls the pin of the grenade,” destroying everything in his path. The eschatology of the Devil’s desperation ends at the Second Advent, Rev 20:1-3. The eschatology of the
Lord’s tactical victory ends at the Gog Revolution, **Rev 20:7-10**. Satan comes back after being in jail for 1,000 years and he has not learned anything; the arrogant are always unteachable and cannot learn anything worthwhile. Satan has learned nothing. To the extent that you entertain any form of arrogance in your life, you can only learn truth the hard way.

Our Lord returns to the earth and brings great happiness with Him; when He ultimately puts Satan down at the end of human history, that happiness lasts forever. In the eschatology of the Devil’s desperation we see his confinement to the earth for 3½ years, **Rev 12:9-13**, and he accelerates the use of his unchecked power to produce the greatest disaster in human history. In the eschatology of the Lord’s tactical victory, Satan is confined again, this time to the abyss for 1,000 years, **Rev 20:1-3**. The eschatology of the Devil’s desperation is a series of confinements, which terminates with Satan spending eternity in the lake of fire. No creature, man or angel, has ever profited from arrogance, and ever will.

The final phrase in **Rev 12:13** reads, “...he persecuted the woman [Israel] who gave birth to the male child [the Lord Jesus Christ].” The first great client nation to God, the nation of Israel, lost its freedom on three occasions, with the administration of the fifth cycle of discipline. The Jews rejected the sign of the virgin birth, and rejected Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. No one can reject the Lord Jesus Christ as the Messiah and ever have eternal life, **Rom 10:9-10, Act 4:12**. When enough people make decisions from a position of weakness, it means loss of freedom for a national entity. For the Jews, their loss of freedom came every time they rejected Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The Jews must fulfill the principle found in **Rom 10:9-10**, “That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.” Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, pauses in the middle of **Romans**, in chapters 9-11, to explain what happened to the Jews in previous dispensations, and relate it to the evangelism of the Jews in the time in which we live.

One of the more subtle forms of attack on the Gospel is the teaching that you have to publicly confess Christ. This is taken from **Rom 10:9-10**, and the problem, as usual, is ignorance of the original language and isagogics. We first have to note the background and context for this passage. We begin at **Rom 9:30**, “What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith...” This is where the passage really begins; Paul has been discussing the problem of the Jews. Though he was an apostle to the Gentiles, and a Roman citizen, this did not keep him from expressing his concern and his love for the Jews. This verse is a reference to salvation in the Old Testament as taught in **Gen 15:6** and quoted in **Rom 4:3**, “Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.” The phrase “by faith” indicates that salvation throughout human history occurred one way only—by personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Jews were trying to attain salvation through the Mosaic Law because they had rejected Christ as Savior. **Rom 9:31-32** continues, “But Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness [who strived for a righteousness with reference to the Law], did not arrive at that law [has not attained that Law]. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.” Israel did not accomplish the true purpose of the
Mosaic Law, which was to be an instructor to bring us to Christ, Gal 3:24-25. Salvation has always been, and will always be, by means of faith, never by means of works.

Throughout this passage we see scripture after scripture being quoted from the Old Testament. The Jews in Paul’s day on every Sabbath would confess adonay as Lord, but they did not equate adonay with Jesus. As unbelievers, they would say, “adonay elohenu adonay echad” (“the Lord is our God, the Lord is one”); they were trying to worship adonay, the Lord, when they had already rejected their Lord—Jesus Christ. This is what Paul was dealing with at the time that he wrote this. They were going into the synagogue and repeating this as a part of their ritual, confessing as unbelievers that God is Lord, but they would not equate “Lord” with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is still happening in Jewish synagogues today. This is the whole story of Romans chapters 9-11.

Even though there is a nation called Israel today, it is not a client nation to God, nor can it ever be again, until the Lord Jesus Christ comes back. This is the time of their dispersion, and we are about to study one of the greatest tragedies that will come their way in the book of Revelation. God used signs throughout the Bible to speak to the Jews, 1Co 1:22, “For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom.” Many signs were given to the Jews, but they rejected every one.

Circumcision was a sign to the Jews that they are a new race, Gen 17:10-11, Rom 4:11. The Passover was given as a sign of the Cross, Exo 12:7-13. The Sabbath was given as a sign of the rest given to God’s people, Exo 31:13-17, Eze 20:12. Bible doctrine, the word of God, was given to the Jews as sign, Deu 6:4-8. The most important sign of all is found in Isa 7:14, the sign of the virgin birth: “Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.” The sign of the Cross itself is recorded in Joh 2:18-21. Finally, the sign of His death, burial, and resurrection took place in Mat 12:39-41, 16:4; Joh 2:19. The Jews have already been given enough signs, Mat 12:39-40, “But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’” The Jews demanded a sign, so our Lord said, “No sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet [a type of His death, burial, and resurrection].”

This was contrary to what the legalistic, religious Jews had taught for many years, and this is why they were put under divine discipline as a nation, and why they go through such terrible holocausts. They had been assigned the responsibility for the formation, preservation, communication, and fulfillment of the canon of Scripture, and they rejected this responsibility. Rom 9:32 goes on to say (quoting from Isa 8:14), “They stumbled over the stumbling stone”; the “stumbling stone” is Jesus Christ. Paul continues in Rom 9:33, “Just as it is written [Isa 28:16], ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense [the Lord Jesus Christ in His hypostatic union], and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.’” This is a summary of the attitude toward Jesus Christ during the dispensation of the hypostatic union. Jesus Christ was the rock that caused the self-righteous to stumble and aroused their opposition.

In Rom 10:1, we see the great burden in Paul’s life: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.” Paul’s “heart’s desire” is for the salvation of the Jews; he was the apostle to the Gentiles, but he never stopped praying for Israel. In Rom 10:2-3 he states, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God,
but not in accordance with knowledge [they are inaccurate in their doctrine]. For not knowing about God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.” The first Jew, Abraham, knew all about the righteousness of God, Gen 15:6, “Abraham believed in the Lord and it was credited to his account for righteousness.” Anyone who adds something to faith in Jesus Christ is in a state of arrogance. They are trying to help God, and salvation cannot be earned or deserved; it is a grace gift from God. The ultimate of human arrogance is ignorance of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish one’s own righteousness. They were producing a human righteousness and a morality by attempting to keep the Law. By not being “obedient to the righteousness of God,” they had refused to believe.

Rom 10:4 is Paul’s great statement about our Lord and what He accomplished: “For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” Christ is the end of the Law because He fulfilled the Law perfectly. As far as righteousness is concerned, Christ is the termination of the Law and any system of human self-righteousness. What the Law could not provide, the Lord Jesus Christ provided. He provides the righteousness based on God’s grace in response to faith. Even in the Old Testament, no one was saved by human works and righteousness.

In every dispensation, God’s policy of grace always excludes human self-righteousness and any form of human good for salvation. Under God’s grace plan, He provides His own perfect righteousness for anyone who will believe in Christ. Therefore, human self-righteousness is rejected. Salvation is always the same—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is revealed in any given dispensation. The unbelievers in the dispensation of Israel were blinded by their own arrogance, human works, self-achievement, and self-righteousness in keeping the Law. Human self-righteousness cannot be added to faith, and it cannot improve on the perfect imputed righteousness of God, which we receive the moment we believe in Jesus Christ. After salvation, only God the Holy Spirit controlling the life of the believer can produce a virtue and experiential righteousness, revealed as “justification by works” in the Bible. For eternal salvation, the only way you accept the righteousness of Christ is simply to believe in Him, and His righteousness is freely imputed to you. You now possess the very righteousness of God, and you are justified and eternally secure forever.

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