

February 6, 2014

Love Those Who Don't Love Us

Romans 12:14 (NASB), ***“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”***

Here at Calvary Baptist Church we are blessed with an excellent Sunday evening Bible study which is led by one of the men in our church. Several weeks back one of the questions that arose during the Bible study was; How are we as Christians to handle persecution? There were varying answers around the table that night some of them focusing on the need at times to defend ourselves.

The question was then directed towards me. My answer came from 1 Peter 2:21-23 which says, ***“For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”***

Once again God in His wisdom is teaching and commanding us to do the opposite of what our human nature tells us to do. When we are persecuted our natural reaction is to fight back but as Christ followers we are not to do this. Instead we are to ***“Bless those who persecute”*** us.

What does it exactly mean to ***“bless”*** someone? The word ***“bless”*** is translated here to mean “speak well of, praise, extol.” In other words we are to speak highly of those who are persecuting us. This seems almost impossible especially when one considers some of the suffering and persecution that Christians have had to endure and endure even yet today in much of the world. Yet this is exactly what we are to do. This means that as American Christians when we are made fun of and reviled both in the public square and elsewhere we are not to think of some clever verbal zinger we can launch back, but rather we are to speak well of those who are persecuting us.

Why are we to do this? Because when we bless those who persecute us it demonstrates to them the love of Jesus Christ and it is radically different than how the rest of the world reacts in such situations. In Matthew 5:44 in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says to us, ***“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”*** In Acts 7:60 as Stephan who was the first Christian martyr is being stoned to death he utters these words in reference to those who hated him, ***“Lord, do not hold this sin against them!”***

Increasingly we live in a culture that is opposed to the cross and to Biblical Christianity. Because of this Christ followers are increasingly under attack in our world. Instead of viewing persecution and suffering as something that is a negative we must first understand that suffering for the truth of the gospel is normative. Secondly we must also understand that when we are reviled, persecuted, and made to suffer this is often times an opportunity to demonstrate God's love. It is an opportunity to demonstrate to the world just how radically different Christians are to be.

In Matthew 5:11 Jesus says, ***“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.”*** Friends we are to view persecution,

trials, and suffering for Christ as a privilege and an honor. My prayer is that as Christ followers we will always demonstrate and share the love of Christ to a world which so needs it even in the face of persecution.