

- I. Persecution, Jesus affirms His deity, Jesus is Judge, the way of salvation
 - A. John 5:16-18 . . . the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath (*healing a sick man and telling him to carry his pallet*). [17] But [Jesus] answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." [18] For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.
 - B. Pray
- II. Persecuted by the church / God does not rest / dishonesty and hypocrisy in criticizing other religious beliefs and actions
 - A. In vs 16-18, John tells us that the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing prohibited things on the Sabbath – such as healing a sick man and telling him to carry his pallet. Jesus responded by explaining that He was simply doing exactly what His father was doing – on the Sabbath. And it was this explanation that upset the Jews even more, because they understood Jesus to be saying that God was His father and that He, too, was God.
 - 1. This part of the story brings up three topics that I believe are important for us to consider. First, there is the topic of persecution by those within the church toward the godly who are part of the church.
 - 2. The second topic of importance is God's work schedule.
 - 3. And the third topic of importance is the dishonesty and hypocrisy that is part of condemning other Christians who are different from us.
 - B. Lets begin with the first topic of importance, which as I've just said, deals with the persecution of the godly by those within the religious system, and that includes Christians – or at least so-called Christians.
 - 1. As we can see from this story in John, and from other NT writings, the religious Jews persecuted those who were truly godly, and those who chose to follow Jesus Christ over following the established Jewish practices.

2. For example, in Matthew 5:11-12, Jesus pointed out that it was the religious Jews, along with the some of the kings, who led the way in persecuting the prophets. And near the end of His life – while looking over Jerusalem, Jesus said, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” (Matthew 23:37a)
3. Jesus, himself, during his three years of ministry, experienced persecution from the religious system, which ended with them putting Him to death.
 - a. For example, we read in Mark 3:1-2, [Jesus] entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. [2] They (*the religious Jews*) were watching Him to see if He would heal him (*the man with the withered hand*) on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.
 - b. And we read in Luke 20:19-20, that the scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Jesus because they feared the people would turn on them because of Jesus’ teachings. So they watched Jesus, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. *This is an example of the church using the government to do the work of removing “unwanted” people from their religious institution.*
4. And we read in John 15:20, that Jesus said to His disciples, “A slave is not greater than his master. If they (*the religious Jews*) persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.”
 - a. We know from the book of Acts – and especially Paul’s participation in the persecution of Christians, and from other books in the NT that the religious Jews persecution of the Christians continued on after Jesus ascended into heaven. And we know that the persecution by the religious of the godly did not stop there, it continued on.
 - b. For example, according to D.M. Bennett, who wrote “*The champions of the church: their crimes and persecutions*” (1878), Catholics have persecuted Protestants: Protestants have ill-treated Catholics: Lutherans have hunted and killed Anabaptists; Episcopalians have burned Puritans; Puritans have hanged Quakers; and Calvinists have tortured Unitarians, and all have united in persecuting the heroic Infidels who have refused to believe in any of the multifarious and conflicting creeds. (Bennett

RM. The champions of the church: their crimes and persecutions. D.M. Bennett, 1878, p. 832)

- c. In our own day, at least in the West, those within the religious system are not killing each other, but we sure talk derogatorily about others who are different from us, and treat them as if they are not God's children, or as if they don't deserve to be God's children.
5. This raises the question, "Why does the persecution of the godly come from within the church?" I suppose there are a number of reasons, but for the sake of time, I want to emphasize only a few.
- a. One of the common drivers for persecution, discrimination, and derogatory comments about other Christians is pride –
 - (1) which is driven by the belief that our theology, our way of understanding scripture, our way of worship, our way of church governance, and our way of adding numbers to the church is the right way, or at least the most godly way.
 - (2) It is this mindset of pride that feeds an arrogant sense of spiritual superiority and the ungodly behavior of harsh criticism and derogatory speaking about those we deem spiritually inferior or just plain unspiritual.
 - (3) And we add to the evil of our pride by rejecting as godly whole groups or denominations of people rather than only those who are obviously ungodly within any particular group. For example, it is not uncommon for Protestants to claim all Catholics are blindly committed to a religious system that is legalistic, unspiritual, and works based, and therefore, all Catholics are unsaved and on their way to hell.
 - (4) In this way, we are much like the unbelieving world who rejects all of Christianity and all Christians because some among us are obviously, perpetually, and unashamedly ungodly. Sadly, though we don't like the world grouping and condemning all Christian religious groups, we are prone to do it toward those groups or denominations within Christianity who are different from us.
 - b. Another common driver is jealousy over the growing popularity of a godly person or persons, which in turn is seen as a threat to the status quo of the established religious system.
 - c. And this brings us to a third common driver for persecution, discrimination, and derogatory comments about other Christians, which is the loss of power, prestige, influence, followers,

and eventually sufficient income to keep the denomination or local church going.

- (1) When another form of doing church, or another group of people, or another preacher or writer, or another theology begins to grow in popularity and draw people away from our group – we are prone to see that as a threat to our power, prestige and influence in the religious community, number of followers, and income.
 - (2) We see this weakness among Jesus’ disciples when John said to Jesus, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name; and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow along with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not hinder him; for he who is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:49-50).
 - (3) It is likely the Catholic church fought Luther as hard as they did, not just because of his theology, but because his theology and teachings were gaining a following that threatened their power, prestige, influence – both religious and political, number of followers, and potential income.
- d. A fourth common driver is being publicly corrected, or being made to look bad by the teachings or godly behaviors of those we are persecuting or demeaning.
- (1) Certainly the religious leaders persecuted Jesus for making them look bad in the eyes of the people.
 - (2) I don’t know how often this happens today on a large scale, but there are stories of individual pastors, church leaders, and even whole churches who have mistreated and driven out those in their midst whose godly living and Biblical teachings have made the pastor, or the leadership, or even the whole church look bad.
6. I believe that if we carefully and honestly look at the church today, we can see that the power of pride, jealousy, the fear of losing power, prestige, influence, followers, and income, and the fear of looking bad still drives some forms of persecution, discrimination, derogatory speaking, and wholesale condemnation of individual Christians or Christian groups who are different from us.
- a. My urging today is that we not look at this issue as something others do, but that we consider the possibility that we have participated in it in some form or another.
 - b. We may never directly persecute other Christians. However, if they do not hold to our theology, or worship the way we do, or

baptize as we baptize, or emphasize the parts of scripture we emphasize, or believe about the sign-gifts as we believe, or evangelize according to our methods, or teach about grace in ways that differ from our teachings about grace, we may discount their faith as sincere faith. We may look down on them as if we are superior and they are inferior. We may disassociate ourselves from them. And we may even determine that their whole group is unsaved and on their way to hell.

7. Think about it this way. When we speak against Seeker churches, or against those whose worship is so loud you have to wear earplugs, or against those who teach grace and love as if continuing to sin doesn't matter, or against those who practice the sign-gifts of tongues, prophecy, and healing, or against any other individual or group of Christians who differ from us,
 - a. are we speaking against them out of a longing for the purity and spiritual health of both the local church and the church universal?
 - b. Is our criticism based on God's word as a whole, or on selected passages that support our position?
 - c. Do we want to love them and find common ground where possible?
 - d. Or have we allowed pride, jealousy, and other ungodly motives to creep in and influence the way we talk about them?
8. Let me remind you that God's word exhorts us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity (*not uniformity*) of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).
 - a. And just prior to His death, Jesus prayed, "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are" (John 17:11).
 - b. There is no question but that we must work to keep the church pure and holy, but we must also work, just as hard, to keep ourselves and those we worship with – HUMBLE, and committed to the unity of the body of Christ. Therefore, may we refuse to be part of those who have been in the church, yet persecuted those within the church. And may we refuse to participate in the wholesale discrediting and rejection of any legitimate Christian group.

- C. The second topic of importance from vs 16-18 deals with the fact, though God rested on the seventh day from His work of creation, He never rests. He never takes a day off – be it a Sabbath day or a holiday. In other words, God never rests from His work of holding all things together, of making the sun shine and rain fall on righteous and unrighteous alike. He never rests from the work of loving us, caring for us, providing for us, protecting us, comforting us, listening to our prayers, and the many other such things that He does without any breaks or lulls or lapses.
1. My reason for bringing this up is because we tend to think God has stopped caring, or stopped working, if He doesn't do what we have asked Him to do, or believe He ought to do, or doesn't do it when or how we think it ought to be done.
 - a. However, Jesus is affirming that Sabbath or not, He and God are working – not have been or will be working, but are working.
 - b. And the fact that Jesus said this should be reason enough for us to have unshakeable confidence that we are safe in God's hands – even when it seems He is not there, or is not doing anything to help.
 - c. And there are times when it feels like you are alone, or that God's is not responding to your prayers, or that God is not giving you the kind of attention you are convinced you need.
 2. How we interpret such times is up to us. But if when reading the Psalms you look for those times when David felt like God was absent, you will find that he does not make those feelings his final conclusion, but rather he affirms his faith in God. For example, we read in Psalm 121:2-4, "My help comes from the LORD, Who made heaven and earth. [3] He will not allow my foot to slip; He who keeps me will not slumber. [4] Behold, He who keeps us will neither slumber nor sleep."
 3. Or as one songwriter said, "When you don't understand. When you don't see His plan. When you can't trace His hand, trust His heart."
 4. And so I urge you, when it feels like God is absent or asleep or disinterested, remember these words from Jesus, that even on the Sabbath – God's proclaimed day of rest – God is at work on your behalf and for your good.
- D. The third topic of importance from vs 16-18 is the dishonesty and hypocrisy that often drives our condemnation of other Christians who are different from us.
1. The religious Jews were appalled and angry that Jesus would break the Sabbath by healing a sick man, and then that He would violate

the sacredness of the Sabbath by telling the sick man to carry his pallet. Why? Because both were considered work, and according to their understanding of scripture and the Jewish customs surrounding the Sabbath, those who took their religion seriously were not supposed to do any work on the Sabbath.

2. However, their dishonesty and hypocrisy showed through in that they appreciated God's work on the Sabbath on their behalf.
 - a. For example, because God continued to work on the Sabbath, they had such necessary things as sunshine, water, air to breath, food to eat, clothes to wear, and the security of a home.
 - b. And because God was working to hold all things together – even on the Sabbath – their spouse did not die, their children did not die, their animals did not die, and their crops did not wither in the field.
 - c. But they were so blinded by their religious pride and zeal that they overlooked or ignored the fact that they were blessed because God worked on the Sabbath.
3. And my point here is that we, too, can let pride and religious zeal rob us of an honest understanding of God and an honest application of the scriptures, so that we become dishonest and hypocritical in our condemnation of others who are not practicing Christianity the same way we are. And when we give way to dishonesty and hypocrisy in our view of other Christians, we will neglect love and act in ungodly ways toward them.

III. Conclusion

- A. Does all that we have talked about today mean we cannot be discerning and critical in our view of other Christians? Absolutely not. But it does mean we **MUST** be humble, self-judging – first, gracious, and doing what we can to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- B. Ephesians 4:1-6 . . . Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, [3] being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.