

Persecution within the Community

Key Verse: *“I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”*
—II Corinthians 12:10

Selected Scripture:
II Corinthians 11:16-12:10

THE TRANSFORMATION OF

Saul of Tarsus into the Apostle Paul demonstrates how God’s providence can overrule in the affairs of men who may be misguided in their actions, but sincere in their hearts.

As a persecutor of the Lord’s disciples before his conversion, (Acts 9:1,2) Saul wrought havoc upon the early followers of Christ and sought to stamp out the new religion of Christianity, which he deemed to be contradictory to his Jewish heritage. His encounter with the risen

Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus was a profound event in his life and caused him to change his course and become a most zealous follower of the Lord.—vss. 3-15

As the Apostle Paul, he labored hard in Corinth in assisting believers to grow in the knowledge of the Lord. Nevertheless, opposition to his efforts arose and false brethren made various charges about his teachings. Some denied his apostleship and he defended himself by citing his credentials, saying, “Are they

ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.” (II Cor. 11:23-28) This suffering was predicted by Christ. “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—Acts 9:16

Another confirmation of Paul’s apostleship is given by his attestation of the number of visions he had received.—II Cor. 12:1,7

In recounting his encounter with the Lord when referring to the messenger of Satan to buffet him, Paul may well have been referring to his impaired eyesight that affected him throughout his ministry after he caught a glimpse of the glorified Lord. Although he prayed to have this affliction removed, his petition was not granted.—vss. 8,9

Our Key Verse reflects Paul’s acquiescence to the Heavenly Father’s will and his dependence upon Christ for grace to sustain him in all of his difficulties. As footstep followers of the Master we, too, should expect persecution and opposition to our service in his cause, but we can also be comforted by our Lord’s counsel uttered the final night of his earthly sojourn—“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33 ■