

The Holy Spirit's Work Despite Opposition

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[0:00] Tonight I want to talk about something close to my heart.

! I think to yours too. You know, we live in a time when the church, or I should say many churches, have joined the surrounding culture to the extent that the two are almost indistinguishable from each other.

If you get the Examiner Enterprise, and I think it was today's, it could have been yesterday, but I'm pretty sure it was today's, article in there by someone that I never heard of talking about how Trump and Pence are trying to force Christianity on the culture.

And you know, I wanted to write her, you can't force Christianity on anybody. You can't do it. God gives the increase. True Christianity.

The late Dr. Francis Schaeffer, who wrote 24 books, and I can highly recommend them. I've read a lot of them, not all of them. Have a dictionary next to them when you read his books, but he's very good.

[1:15] He warned about that time. And he died about 1975. Maybe it was 81. But anyway, he warned that this was coming on the church.

Really and truly in the grand scheme of things, only a small minority of churches today are willing to stand up to the surrounding culture or the government on issues with which they are in conflict.

And you know, we're supposed to be the most obedient people on earth when it comes to our relationship with the governing authorities. And we're supposed to be the most obedient people on earth. Just as long as they don't ask us to do something that is a clear violation of scripture.

Then we can't obey that. But we have to also be willing to pay the price for that disobedience. And there will be a price. Years ago, I was in China, in Beijing, and we were meeting with the president of China.

And I was in the palace or whatever they call a government state office, I think. It's funny too. I had some libel in Chinese and I slipped one over the cushion.

[2:29] I was hoping a janitor would find that or somebody. But they, you know, and they were cracking down on the underground church and they still do.

I just wanted to get that president one-on-one and say, these are really the most loyal people you have. Just as long as you don't ask them to violate scripture. But they wouldn't have understood that, of course.

Dr. Schaeffer had this to say. And he wrote this 30 years ago. If the church is not willing to stand up to the state and expose it when it violates precepts handed down by God, then Caesar has become Lord.

You know, either God is Lord or Caesar is Lord. Caesar being the state. And we've got to be willing, when they ask us to violate clear precepts of scripture, to refuse to do that and expose it.

This is exactly what Peter and John did. You know, they were arrested the first time about 24 hours after the church was formed on the day of Pentecost.

[3:48] They were already in jail. And then they were arrested about a week later and brought before the Sanhedrin. The fact that the church gets along so well in our day with the surrounding culture dominated by the state is a relatively new phenomenon.

It was not like that in the first 1900 years of the New Testament church. At the end of his earthly ministry, the Lord warned his followers that they were going to be hated by the surrounding culture. He said, the world is going to hate you because it hates me. And they would have to live out their lives in a very hostile world.

You know, we sometimes overlook that fact, but we live on a hostile planet. It is very much opposed to Christ. And that is generated, that opposition by the world spirit, Satan.

He can't get to Christ, so what does he attack? He attacks the apple of the Lord's eyes, which is the church. Of the eleven disciples, true disciples, Judas being a false one, of the eleven, ten were martyred.

[5:17] Ten paid with their lives. Only John was spared and he lived out most of his life in exile on the Isle of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. The apostles and those closely associated with them were denounced.

They were persecuted. They were hunted. They were arrested. They were beaten, imprisoned. And ten of them ultimately killed. I hope all of you have a copy and have looked at Fox's Book of Martyrs.

If you don't, run out the VOM to the bookstore. They've got them out there. I've got a bunch of them, including an 1812 that's about this big. Huge. I bought it in Edinburgh. And the guy said, I don't know what that is.

Would you give me \$50? I said, yeah. I gave it to him. Fox's Book of Martyrs details many of the accounts of the persecuted members of Christ's body.

I've often said I think that should be required reading for entrance into heaven. Consider some of these facts.

[6:28] The disciples, with the exception of John, were all martyred. Polycarp, who was a minister to the church in Smyrna.

And remember that? That's the second church in Revelation chapter 2. He was burned at the stake. And Smyrna, along with Philadelphia, are the only two churches that don't receive condemnation. Years ago, I was in Smyrna. It's now called Ismir. A Muslim name. But I was in Smyrna. There's still a church there.

It's small. But they talk about it. They talk about Polycarp. And they directed me to the spot. There's an old Roman fort there.

And it's amazing. And I've been in several countries over there. You don't pay a fee to go in there. It's unprotected. You just go in. Look around. It was huge.

[7:25] And they showed me the spot where they think Polycarp was murdered. Burned at the stake. And there was all this Roman pottery on the ground. Kids playing and throwing them.

Breaking them. So I picked up a big old bag full. I've still got it. I meant to bring it tonight. But it's that Roman pottery from the spot where Polycarp was murdered.

The Protestant reformers were hunted down. Many of them were killed. Of course, there was a price on Luther's head. Put there by the Pope.

Godly leaders such as John Huss, Hugh Latimer, William Tyndale, Patrick Hamilton, and George Wissert were all murdered. And I've been at the spot where Patrick Hamilton and George Wissert were burned at the stake.

Stood right there. In 2012, thereabouts, 125,000 Christians were killed because they would not deny Christ.

[8:28] That's in our day. So that still goes on. Then the Lord introduced us to the theme of persecution in chapter 15. And he picks it up again in chapter 16 where we find ourselves this evening of John, by the way.

John 16, 1-4. These things I have spoken to you so that you may not be kept from stumbling. Let me back up. So that you may be kept from stumbling.

They will make you outcasts from the synagogue. But an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

Serving God by killing believers. That's what they believed. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or me. But these things I have spoken to you so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them.

These things I did not say to you at the beginning because I was with you. Now when the Lord speaks here of these things, he is referring to the world's hostility.

[9:45] Hostile to Christ, hostile to his followers. He warned them and he warns us about the hostility of the world so they wouldn't stumble.

They wouldn't be afraid. They were told in advance it's going to happen. I guess we could call it the new normal. I hear that word all the time. Stumble is a word in the Greek language that draws a picture of falling into a trap.

You're out and about and you fall into a trap. The Lord does not want his children falling into traps set by the hostile world and the God of this world, little G, who is Satan.

Had the Lord not so warned them when persecution came, they might have disintegrated as his followers.

And instead, they were well prepared for the inevitable. I told you about the lady that joined this church on a Sunday, got robbed on Monday, came to Dr. McBride Tuesday, said, I joined the church, I became a Christian Sunday, I got robbed on Monday, what's going on?

[11:01] And Mike said, you're not in heaven. And she said, well, I don't have anything to do with it. And she walked away. She thought she had this supernatural protection.

And we do have. Nothing's going to befall us. It's not within the sovereign will of God. How appropriate, though, that Jesus warned them, for they're going to suffer persecution that very night. All this is just hours before the crucifixion. They're going to head over to the Garden of Gethsemane about early April on our timescale.

That's when we're going to get to the... They're going to be preparing to head over there. We're going to do the high priestly prayer and then they're launched out. But they're going to go to the Garden of Gethsemane and they're going to view persecution firsthand.

Some of them are even going to suffer persecution and they're going to scatter as a result of the arrest of Jesus. Now, Jesus went on to describe what kind of persecution they would suffer.

[12:13] First of all, He said to them, you will be made outcasts from the synagogue. You have to understand something in Israel.

The synagogue was the center of life in Israel. Center of life. Dare I say that, remember when the church used to be that.

It was that way when we came here 37 years ago. To be banned from the synagogue was to be cut off from the nation of Israel.

They could no longer benefit from the religious, the economic, or the social life of Jewish society. It was all caught up in the synagogue. And one of the greatest fears of a Jew was excommunication. Being kicked out and not allowed in.

[13:11] And I guess that's a big fear among Catholics. I think they still go through the rite of excommunication. Particularly if you visit a Baptist church. We had a member here, Mary Barbie then, then later Mary Bates, Scott Bates' wife.

She went through intense persecution by her mother because she was coming here. And it was intense. It wasn't physical. She didn't beat her. She would maybe get up about 5.30, I guess a lot of women do that, and start getting makeup.

And her mother would set a chair down and watch her just bawl, scream, shriek. Finally, her mother said, will you at least agree to go to the Catholic church and talk to one of the leaders?

I didn't know they have deacons in the Catholic church. And she said, okay. So her mother hauled her down to the deacon at the Catholic church. And Nedra said she's dead now. Not Mary, Nedra, her mother.

She said, this is my daughter. She's attending Highland Park Baptist Church. And that guy said, oh, that's a great church. I know the pastor there. It just deflated her. That's a good church.

[14:15] If you ever want to come back, you're always welcome, but that's a strong church. Poor little girl. So it's ironic that the very men who feared excommunication did not realize that they're going to be murdered for their faith.

You know, when they were still unbelievers, the disciples, they feared, don't do anything to get excommunicated. And now they're going to be murdered for their faith in Christ.

The people that killed them and kill Christians today often think they're offering service to God in doing so.

And I've got to tell you, in Islam, that's rampant. That they're doing God a favor. All these guys that blew up that were betraying them, they were doing God a favor by eliminating us.

I was talking to Diane last night, and I said, I can't imagine what's it like like a suicide bomber blows up and kills a bunch of people, kills himself, and all of a sudden he's standing before Jesus on the throne, high and lifted up, Isaiah, and he's got to look up there and say, are you Mohammed?

[15:33] He just answered. And then he hears, no, I'm Jesus, whom you persecuted. And then, you know, what happens from there? When you go back to the New Testament era, to the beginning, probably the greatest enemy of Christians and the church, the early church, was a man

named Saul.

Sound familiar? He later would be known as Paul. Pillar of the church. Don't tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor.

Took the great persecutor, you're going to suffer for my name. And he became Paul. He was very hostile to the followers of Christ.

He wanted to stamp out this new religious cult, which he called it. It had arisen in the nation of Israel. And he went to the high priest and got letters of arrest, arrest warrants, if you will, to hunt down Christians and to bring them to Jerusalem to trial and let's face it, certain death.

I mean, they didn't just fine you. You know, they killed you. And I'm convinced when he was on the way to Syria that Damascus, that he was bringing those Christians back to kill him.

[17:08] That's what he was going to do. Well, he was the great hunter of Christians. And after his conversion, Paul the hunter became Paul the hunted.

And there was a high price on his head. Well, they wanted him. The Jews would stop at nothing to kill him. Well, why didn't they?

It wasn't God's timing. Eventually, Rome would kill him. But it wasn't God's timing for that. So, he was hunted and they wanted him.

The Lord himself predicted that Paul would experience great hatred and persecution in the furnace of serving him.

here's an example. Paul talking 2 Corinthians chapter 11. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites?

[18:10] So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? Listen to Paul.

I speak as if insane. I more so in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.

Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Some people think he was stoned to death.

And resurrected. We're not sure of that. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I've spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren.

I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Now let's have a hymn of invitation and see who was part of that.

[19:36] You know, I've always said I want to write a Christian tract somebody that says if you come to Christ, you're going to lose friends, you may lose family members, you're going to be ostracized, you may be sent to Africa to live out your life in a hut telling people about Jesus and you may lose your life.

Now let's play just as I am and see who will come. And you know the irony is there are some who will come. They will come. They're called the elect of God and they will come.

And they do it every day. Now the people who did this to Paul and they did all those things and I'm sure much more, they would have told us they were serving God.

They were doing God a favor. How could they do that? How could they do such a thing? They did it because they did not know the Father and they did not know His Son.

That's the only way they could pull that off. The Lord also warned His disciples because of approaching persecution. He knew they were going to face torture and death for His name.

[20:53] And people face that in our day every single day. Peter wrote this in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 12 and 13. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery or deal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you, but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exaltation.

That's a high order, isn't it? you're going to be persecuted. Rejoice. You're in an exalted position. And Jesus next offers them words of great comfort in John 16 verse 5-7, but now I'm going to Him who sent me, I can only be the Father, and none of you ask me where are you going, but because I've said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

He's omnipotent, isn't he? He knows everything. Your hearts are filled with sorrow right now, but I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the helper will not

come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you.

And of course we know who the helper is, right? That's the Spirit of God, comes upon true believers and dwells them, never leaves them, never forsakes them. As the cross came closer, and it's mere hours away, the disciples should have been offering comfort to the Lord.

Look at the trial he's going to face. Instead, it's the other way around. The Lord warned them about coming persecution, and they were sorrowful for themselves.

[22 : 59] How are we going to endure this? He's going to be gone. He's going to die. Instead of offering the Lord comfort, they should have been filled with joy that the earthly mission of the Lord is almost complete, and He is returning to the Father to a position of glory at the right hand of the Father, and the Lord had told them they should be rejoicing at this thing.

See, what the disciples could not grasp was that it was to their advantage that Jesus would depart. They couldn't handle it. In fact, I think it was Peter who said, it ain't going to happen.

I'm going to let it happen. And Jesus looked at Peter and said, get behind me, Satan. This is why I came. Jesus had some things to go through, though, didn't He?

He's going to go through His atoning death. He's going to be separated from the triune God for the first and only time in His eternal life.

And I think when the psalmist said that, and Jesus said it from the cross, He quoted the Psalms, said, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? I think He was saying, my God the Father, my God the Spirit, why have you forsaken me?

[24 : 25] Now, not many theologians believe that, but I do, so be at peace with me. Anyway, they couldn't grasp, He's going to die an atoning death.

That meant He had secured salvation for His band of true followers, Judas excluded, and all who would believe through them.

And that's down to the 21st century, that's down to this night. Second, He had to leave so He could send the Holy Spirit, referred to here as the helper.

He's sending the Holy Spirit to them. I heard a great message on the Holy Spirit yesterday. And I'm going to actually get online and copy it. You know who I heard it from? Jim Merritt. Remember Jim? He came here in 1980, preached a series of messages. Our interim pastor, John Pickrell, they had gone to school together. Jim Merritt, great guy, big church, former president of the convention, right here in Little River City.

[25 : 35] Brought some great messages. Jesus also told them that the Holy Spirit would be involved in a convicting ministry, verses 8 to 11.

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. Concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me, and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me, concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

And that's Satan. I don't think Satan can read very well. he hadn't read the end of the book or something. Or he doesn't believe it's going to come out that way.

We think in terms of the Holy Spirit ministering to believers, and that is of course true. But He also ministers to the unbelieving world. He pours out conviction on unbelievers, convicting them of their separation from Christ.

And really that's the only way you can bring a person to Christ. They've got to see that need. That they're separate. I saw that when I was 30 years old. I knew I was separated from Him.

[27 : 04] The central truth of the Bible is this, no one can be saved apart from the Spirit's conviction and regenerating work. He leads a ministry of conviction and regeneration.

salvation. By nature, people are in rebellion to God. You ever think about that? We live on a planet that's in rebellion to God.

Total rebellion. And it's natural. The human family is so defiant toward God that He says many times in the Old and New Testament that we are spiritually dead until made alive by the Spirit of God.

And I've said before, being dead means the inability to do anything. Can't do anything. Can't breathe. Can't think.

Can't roll over. I've begged at house, not this at house, no funeral home, if you do my funeral term on my side, I cannot stand to lay on my back.

[28:16] Just turn me on my side or my stomach. He said, oh, we can do that. There's something about laying on my back that would bug me for eternity. We are dead in trespasses and sins until we are made alive.

That is why the inspired text says many times dead in trespasses and sin. Not wounded. You know, if you're wounded, you can get a little salve, you can get a band-aid, call your mom if she's still alive.

She'll know what to do. I used to tell Diane they might or furious. But, you know, we could do that. So we're dead. We're not wounded. We are by nature children of wrath.

Let me read to you the most revealing section of Scripture on this. You already know where I'm going. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 3, talking about the human race.

There is none righteous, no, not one. one human. How many righteous humans are there? There's none.

[29:23] There is none who seeks after God. I can't tell you how many times people say, well, I was seeking God and I found Him. I'm sure glad. Oh, it doesn't work that way.

They have all turned aside. They've all together become unprofitable. Try this one. there is none who does good, no, not one. Now, is there good in the world?

Yeah. Are there people that do some good things? Well, yeah. But we're holding them up to the light of Christ. We're saying, God here, let's compare ourselves to God.

I always think of Dr. Salk who invented the polio vaccine, saved billions of children from the iron lung, and died an agnostic Jew. Never did believe.

That I know of. None who do good, not even one. Their throat is an open tomb. With their tongues they have practiced deceit. The poison of ask is under their lips.

[30:28] Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. And the way of peace they have not known.

And then Paul sums it up, there is no fear of God before their eyes. And what's the beginning of all wisdom?

Fear of God. The fear of God. By the way, Paul in Romans 3, 10 to 18, everything he says there is in the Old Testament. Psalms and Isaiah principally.

Every one of those. So the Jews should have already heard that. the Holy Spirit convicts the world of sinfulness.

And there is with every human a God shaped void. You know, you find an atheist or an agnostic on his deathbed and he's searching.

[31:27] He is searching. The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sinfulness. the Holy Spirit also convicts the world of the righteousness of Christ and of the coming judgment.

All of this is the work of the Spirit. I remember hearing, he's a professor at Oxford, a mathematician, I can't think of his last name, and he's debating Richard Dawkins, probably the world's best known atheist who's at Oxford, and Dawkins is just slamming Christianity.

Just slamming it. And this guy that's a believer is a professor of higher mathematics at Oxford. He turns to Dawkins and he said, what will you do with Jesus?

Dawkins' response was, I knew you'd just bring up some obscure peasant in a dirty, dusty country who's dead and buried in dust himself. That was his response. The last time we were in Scotland, we went to Bannockburn, if you have any Scottish blood in you know what Bannockburn was.

It's where the Scots won their freedom from England. And we're at Bannockburn and this guy, you know, it was a weird thing. I'm with Diane and her niece and we're sitting on this wall, we'd already been out, and I'd been there before, Diane and I had, and we'd done, we were getting ready to go back to the hotel, which was about from here to that hotel over there.

[33:06] And this guy walks by me, I didn't know him, he just drove up on a motorcycle and part of the walks by and he said, he looked at me and he said, my father was an atheist and I'm an atheist and there is no God.

And we hadn't said a word, we were just sitting there. Those girls looked at me and I looked at him and he just kept walking. So I took Diane and Shelly back to the hotel, again it was right there, and then I said, I'll be back later.

And Diane says, where are you going? I said, I'm going to let him get away with that. So I went back over and I sat down on that wall. and it took about 30-40 minutes and here he came.

And I said, hey, come over here. He did. And I said, sit down with me. What? I said, sit down, have a seat, let's talk. And I said, I heard what you said, your dad was an atheist, you're an atheist. I said, you don't like religion, you don't like churches. Oh yeah, I hate them. I said, okay. But let me ask you a question. What are you going to do when you stand before Jesus Christ?
[34 : 25] And I said, and that day's coming, my friend. I promise you. What are you going to do with Jesus? And boy, I saw the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. Now, I didn't quote, leave him to the Lord or anything like that.

I don't know, he may have gotten on that motorcycle, that's the last he's ever thought of it. But who knows what might have happened. But we talked for 20 or 30 minutes. And he was visibly shaken at the prospect of meeting Jesus.

And I always remember that. It was kind of like a God event, you know, how he would come by and say that. And he was a big old boy. I didn't have the courage to go back over it. I didn't have a gun, you know.

But anyway, I just told him, I'm not going to let him get away with it. So it's the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of the righteousness of Christ, of the coming judgment, and it's coming. All of this is the work of the Spirit. As the Spirit of God convicts, people react in one of two ways.
[35 : 36] some receive Christ. Others reject Christ. Probably the most reject Christ. Those who reject Him, absent genuine repentance at some point, face an eternal destruction away from God's merciful presence.

Those who receive Him will be ushered into inexpressible glory. I heard a guy preach in a class, asked the group, he said, who's in charge of hell?

Of course, they all said, well, Satan is. They said, Satan's not in charge of anything. Jesus Christ is in charge. Satan's just a member, a resident in the lowest part.

God. And he said, now he said this, and I've had good preachers, I think even Don said, I don't hold to that.

I'm not saying I hold to it or don't hold to it, but he maintained that Jesus, people say hell is the absence of God. And I understand that concept. I've taught that concept.

[36 : 52] But I've heard others say, it's not the absence of Christ, it's Christ without mercy. That's hell. You have to deal with God in the absence of one drop of mercy.

It's like that Lazarus and the rich man, you know, when Lazarus said, if I could just have one drop of water on my tongue, because it's on fire. I know whatever it is, I don't want to be there.

I don't want to go there. And I know that you all don't either. And being one with Christ, we won't.