

FALL 2023

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A Newsletter from The Institute of Biblical Leadership

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# SUFFERING

By Dr. David Phelan

## ▶ PERSECUTION. TURMOIL. TRIBULATION. AFFLICTIONS OF VARIOUS SORTS.

These are the matters explored in this edition of Side-by-Side. These are not fun, light-hearted topics. None of us enjoy times of difficulty. We do not want to suffer ourselves, nor do we want others to have to endure adversity or suffering. We want God to act and remove the pain, so life can return to “normal.”

But scripture is clear. Jesus himself definitely tells us in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation.” The word used for “tribulation” covers the full range of trouble we experience in life: persecution, affliction,

distress, tribulation, pressure. It includes external trouble from earthly authorities. It includes spiritual attacks from Satan and his legion of demons. It includes harassment by other people. It includes God-ordained difficulties to direct us and grow us. And it includes the consequences of self-inflicted sinful foolishness. The word conveys the idea of the challenge of coping with and properly responding to the internal, heart-felt pressure brought about by the tribulation.

And there is the rub! How do we respond when, “now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.” (1 Peter 1:6) This topic is addressed again and again throughout the New Testament: in the gospels (see John 15 and 16 for example); in Acts (see the stoning of Stephen, the imprisonment of Peter; the beating of Paul and Silas in Philippi; and many

others); throughout Paul’s letters (Romans 12, 1 Thess 5; 2 Timothy 2 and 3, and elsewhere); in James 1; in Peter’s writings (1 Peter 1 and 2); and throughout the book of Revelation!

And with what do the biblical writers comfort and exhort us?

- **“...you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world...”** We need to remember our origin story: we are no longer of this world; we dwell in a foreign land.
- **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”** Our Savior will enable us to overcome all that this foreign country throws our way.
- **“...but he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, ‘Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’”** God will be gloried through our suffering as we are faithfully obedient.
- **“...and behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell...”** He sends his servants to provide us with protection and provision.
- **“...and suddenly there was a great earthquake... and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened... the jailer called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas... and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”** Our faithfulness in the midst of suffering will proclaim the gospel and advance the Kingdom.
- **“...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind... Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good...”** Rise above what this world offers and become holy!
- **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them... Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”** Conduct yourself in a consistently humble, holy manner for the glory of God!

And there is so much more counsel and support we are given throughout scripture, so we may grow up to be the Oaks of Righteousness God declares us to be, able to avoid the rot and pestilence of this world; to withstand the storms of life; and to endure the fires of Satan's legions.

**Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24



**Dr. David Phelan**

President, IBL

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## PARTNER POST



There are regions in the majority world very open to evangelism and deeply appreciative of biblical Christianity. But there are other areas suffering with various forms of harassment and persecution. This article was co-authored by two of our national partners, writing under pseudonyms, living in a region of deep spiritual darkness, cultural violence toward Christians, and official antagonism and harassment. Please pray for all our Brothers and Sisters who endure continual affliction for the sake of the gospel.

We have purposefully left the writing style as much as possible in the voice of one for whom English is a second language, to emphasize the global nature of Christian persecution.

# PERSECUTION OF VARIOUS KINDS

By: Paul and Barnabas

▶ “Persecution.” This word is a very popular terminology often seen used in religious perspective throughout the world. It can be seen and exist in various forms and it does not only affects the person individually but it leaves

lasting effects on the emotions, health, and mental level of a person.

Persecution has been going on in Christianity since from a very long time. It has come in many different forms. It has come in the form of rejection by the society



and the family members, beatings, harassment, arrest, accusations, imprisonment, and in some cases, it has resulted in death also. In recent times we do see persecution going on at a very rapid pace and especially to the people who are outcast, looked down upon, rejected, and suppressed, the weaker sections of the society who cannot fight back for their rights.

They are treated in this way because they embraced and put their faith in the one and only Savior. They are accused by the society and individuals as a betrayer to their traditional religion. They are falsely accused of being converted to a foreign/western religion by the allurements of money and jobs. It has been continually said of genuine Christians since many decades.

We know and have spoken with many people who have gone through the persecution. They have shared their traumatic experiences by telling that they had been mistreated, beaten, yelled at, and locked up in prison for days, months, and in some cases it has been extended to a year.

But they have become even more stronger in witnessing for the Almighty Savior; they have not rejected Him in the face of adverse hardships. Now, in some places laws have been put into play where Christians are stopped and threatened if they carry the Holy Bible along with them, and have been forced to stop gathering together for prayer and worship.

Many spoke of how they have been taken by the police when they gathered with other believers to pray and have fellowship. They took them to the police station for deep questioning and after that thrown into prison. They have been asked to pay the hefty amount for their bail but due to poor financial conditions they failed to pay that amount.

Almighty Savior has been gracious to the faithful men and women as they had been released most of the time. And now after they had personally experienced the greatness of the Almighty in their lives they share wonderful testimonies to encourage others to stay stronger.

**As you think about those who are going through the persecution, please consider the following prayer request as an encouragement.**

- Pray for our Savior's mission to be accomplished.
- Pray for the persecutor as the Lord Almighty shows his greatness to them, that they may accept the truth.
- True followers may stay strong and not shrink back in witnessing gospel truth.
- Almighty God grant them strength to tolerate all the pains and hardship.
- Many doors open up for the gospel penetrations.
- All people may realize the truth of the gospel so that they may honor and glorify Him through their lives.
- True followers may always rely on God's provision and strength during the hard times.



# PATIENCE IN MINISTRY

By: Rick McKay

▶ I'm old enough to remember the 1976 Heinz Tomato Ketchup commercial called, "It's slow good," featuring the song "Anticipation" by Carly Simon. It seemed like they played that commercial all the time, and I always enjoyed it. I don't know why, maybe it was the idea of patience, or maybe I just like ketchup!

Patience isn't just a twiddling of our thumbs, but is an active endurance. It's an endurance arising—not out of resignation—but out of hope and love.

Two years ago, when our church went through a difficult ordeal, we learned patience in ministry. A group wanted control of the church and used verbal attacks and false rumors to do so. Thankfully, one of our resourceful deacons reached out to IBL, who

worked with us and helped us catch our breath. Working with them was an amazing experience! We couldn't have asked for a better collaboration. They were like an extension of our own leadership team, helping us understand what God wanted for our church and giving us ideas and suggestions to steer us through the choppy waters.

As our church let God guide us through the uncertainty, IBL was like a GPS, correcting our course and providing valuable assistance by listening to our needs, offering suggestions, and tailoring everything to fit our specific situation.

Through this experience, I discovered that patience truly is a priceless virtue when it comes to ministry. Romans

5:3-4 underlines that patience, stemming from tribulation, is a refining process. It molds character and instills hope in the hearts of believers.

Tertullian says, "Hope is patience with the lamp lit." This quote conveys that true hope is not just a passive waiting for something good to happen. It's an active state of patience and endurance. Even in the face of adversity or uncertainty, we keep our light and optimism ready and wait for the desired outcome.

For years, I have enjoyed biking and hiking, for the thrill, the rush, and maybe a sprinkle of those health benefits people rave about. But previously I was a jogger. One evening, as I was huffing and puffing, I had an epiphany. In my pain and discomfort, I remember thinking, "My feet haven't fallen off, my lungs haven't burned up. So, is this as hard as it gets? And if so, this is not as bad as I had imagined." Suddenly, the idea of 'slow and steady patience' clicked. I could enjoy the scenery and

the rhythm of my breathing. I could think more clearly. Since then, long, slow-distance exercising has become a daily joy.

James 1:2-4 further amplifies the lesson I learned during that time.

Being patient during difficult times was an important lesson and a valuable experience. I learned that those trials were not punitive punishments but were opportunities for slow growth meant to deepen my faith, produce character, and make me more Christ-like.

John Bunyan recognized the wisdom of patience by creating the character Patience in his book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, considered essential reading for Christians a century ago. I love the following quote because, in my opinion, it perfectly

sums up the attitude of patience in Christian ministry.

Christian nodded. "Now I see that Patience has superior wisdom in many ways, first of all, because he waits for the best things. Second, because he will also have the glory of his inheritance when the other has nothing but rage."

**Christian  
nodded.  
"Now I see  
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best things."**

In the story, it is inspiring how Christian manages to escape with the help of the key “Promise.” It taught me how important it was to cling to God’s promises, especially during tough times. I must never forget that God’s faithfulness and promises will bring hope, joy, and the strength to keep going.

I have learned that patience isn’t developed overnight but is sculpted gradually every day. How can we cultivate patience? How can we find the appropriate level of patience?

Patience means doing what we can with what God provides. If a person or situation seems intolerable, God will help you find a way around it, or He will solidify the ground upon which you stand.

In his book, “Respectable Sins, Confronting the Sins We Tolerate,” Jerry Bridges says that people and situations do not cause us to be impatient or irritable. “They merely provide an opportunity for the flesh to assert itself. The actual cause of our impatience lies within our hearts, in our attitude of insisting

that others around us conform to our expectations.”

1 Corinthians 13:7 reflects the intimate relationship between love and patience. Genuine love for God fosters patience. When we love God

deeply, we have hope and trust in His timing, plans, and ultimate goodness.

Through prayer and reading Scripture, we can maintain the awareness that God gives us the patience and endurance to do His work, despite our lack of natural ability to be patient. When we trust in God’s timing and plan, it brings us hope and joy. As a Christian, it’s

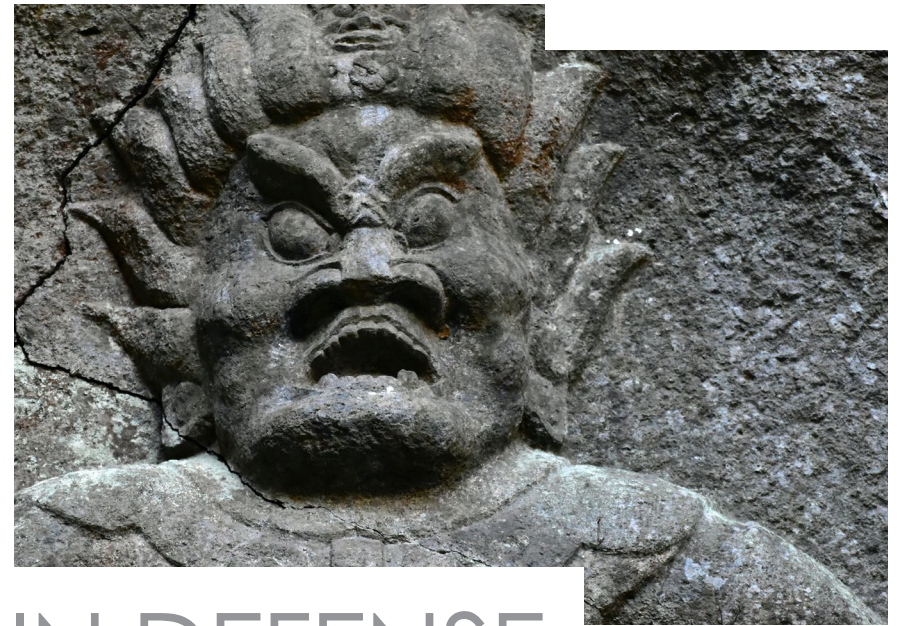
important to focus on nurturing the fruits of the Spirit, like patience.

**But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...**



**Rick McKay**

Deacon Chairman of a church in south-central Texas



**IN DEFENSE OF SATAN**

By: Dr. Dave Deets

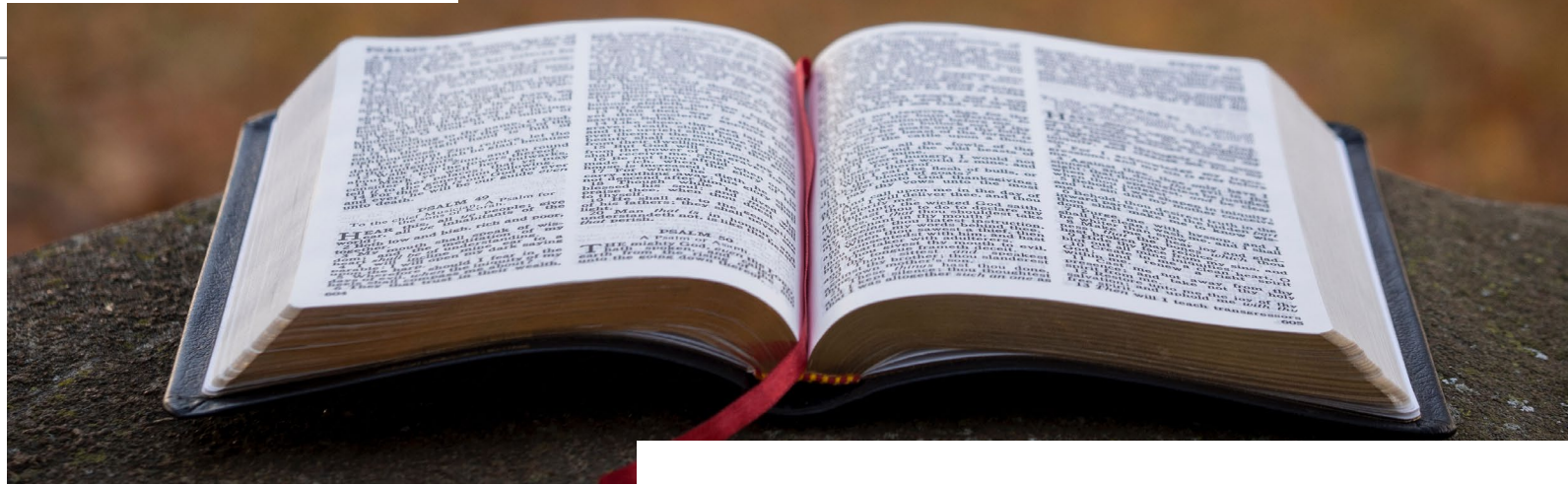
▶ We all know the adage, “the Devil made me do it.” As a Christian, it is one of the easiest excuses to make, but I would like to challenge that excuse. There are many situations which lead to dysfunction, disunity, and disorder within a leader’s life, ministry, church, organization, or leadership team. One of the things we at IBL often hear is, “Satan is working!” Well, maybe Satan isn’t working as much as we think he is! Satan is not always the reason why things are not going well. In fact, Satan may not even be the

major contributor to many episodes of dysfunction, disunity, or disorder. Too many Christians are quick to blame Satan for the turmoil in their ministries. While this may seem odd, I feel someone needs to defend Satan.

No, I’m not talking about being pro-Satan. Nor am I suggesting he isn’t evil or no longer desires to destroy the work of Christ. All of those things continue to be true; and it will be a great day when he is thrown into Hell forever. However, let’s not blame him for everything. Let’s stop the blame-

shifting from ourselves, and start taking ownership of our own faults and failures as believers.

The other articles in this issue of Side-by-Side deal with patience and perseverance in ministry. But something we all need to acknowledge is maybe, just maybe, we are the cause of the turmoil and dysfunction in our ministry, and not Satan. So, here are five situations in which I need to stop blaming Satan.



## When I fail to follow God's Word

(Ps. 119:9-11) The psalmist reminds us here that there is a correlation between God's word and my actions. In other words, we cannot devoid our lives of the Word of God and expect to live godly, Christ-honoring lives. Keeping from sin and obedience to God's Word are inseparably linked. I cannot live contrary to God's word and expect things to go well in my life. So, next time I am tempted to blame Satan for something that has happened, I must first ask myself, "Am I following God's Word?" If the answer is no, then let's not blame Satan!

## When I fail to let God lead

(Prov. 3:5-6) Running ahead of God is not only easy to do, for many of us it is our default mode. We often don't have bad intentions, we simply don't stop to let Him lead us where He wants us to go. It is too easy to rely on our own understanding, our own thoughts, ideas, and perspectives. We don't intentionally cause harm; we are simply careless in not allowing God to lead. This approach can produce devastating results for which we are tempted to blame Satan, that he is attacking us. Instead of blaming him, we need to repent of our exuberance and arrogance, seek God's forgiveness, and fall in line to follow Him once again. After all, He directs our steps, and He shepherds us even through the valley of the shadow of death.

## When I fail to heed wise counsel

(Prov. 11:14) We all know there is safety in numbers, yet most of us love to express our staunch independence. Oh, we know we should listen to our friends, family, and spiritual leaders who offer wise counsel, yet there is often something inside of us that balks at advice or counsel that is contrary to what we really want to do. However, one of the greatest marks of humility is when we choose to listen to those who love and care for us, and then actually follow the godly advice we have received. God hasn't given us godly counselors as token advice-givers. He has brought us together to model the Trinity as we labor together and seek to follow the wise counsel of other brothers and sisters. So, next time you choose to go against the wise advice, counsel, and even pleading of others, own your foolishness and do not blame Satan for the troubles that come your way.

## When I fail to walk in the Spirit

(Gal. 5:16) Paul makes it abundantly clear to the church of Galatia that when they walk in step with the Spirit, they will not fulfill the desires of the flesh. We have all seen someone who has lost their temper and has reacted in a shocking, sinful manner. In such situations, the person often claims their outburst is righteous anger. In fact, rarely, if ever, do we as Christians display righteous anger. Rather, we are most often displaying anger born by a desire of the flesh for vindication. The Spirit's work in our life is love, joy, peace, meekness temperance and many more holy patterns. If I am not displaying the fruit of the Spirit, then I am displaying the works of the flesh. And that is my own issue that needs to be addressed; it is not something that Satan made me do.

## When I fail to pray

(James 1:5-8) Solomon was known as the wisest of men. Wisdom is a great attribute, but one that is too often lacking in our lives. This is why James states that if you lack wisdom, then you need to ask God. We know we should seek God at all times, but James reminds us that especially in times where we need to understand and act wisely, we need to be utterly reliant on God. We need to pray for His wisdom and His discernment. Far too often, we say, "I've got this!" when the reality is, "We got nothing!" May we not be so blinded by our weaknesses that we fail to seek the wisdom from above. If you do act without consulting God, then you are to blame, not Satan.

So, the next time you are tempted to say, "Satan is working," be sure to check your own thoughts and actions. Perhaps you are somehow failing to trust God, and not submitting to the resources He has given you. Satan is alive and well, but I am not convinced he is behind all the issues we encounter in our personal lives or ministries.



**Dr. Dave Deets**

VP of Ministries, IBL



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