

So Great A Heritage

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nailed to a cross. If God allowed His Son not to escape the world's wrath and hatred for the things of God, Christians should also expect difficulties. *"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you;...."* John 15:19-20

We get upset if someone makes a joke about our faith or even scoffs at us. Most of us today have little understanding of what Christians before us suffered for their beliefs. Here are some reminders of the sacrifices and suffering early Christians faced for their faith and godly lifestyles:

✞ The first followers of Jesus ran for their lives as they were pursued (Acts 8) for believing and professing that Christ was risen (Acts 4:2-3) and was their Saviour. It was not the unsaved, but the religious, who often initiated much of their persecutions even before A. D. 30.

✞ Saul, before he was saved,

took part in the killing of the first martyr for Christ, Stephen. Saul, later renamed Paul, watched as the godly preacher was stoned to death.

✞ Believing Jesus Christ was the long-awaited Messiah cost many in the early churches. It cost them their belongings, reputations, livelihoods, imprisonment, and even their lives.

✞ The apostles were persecuted for their beliefs, and most died because of them. Paul, who once led the slaughter against Christ's disciples (Acts 9:1, 2), faced imprisonment, beatings, stonings, and persecution (II Corinthians 11:25) after being saved and becoming a faithful follower of Christ's teachings.

✞ The persecution of Christ's followers continued after the death of the apostles. Foxe's Book of Martyrs describes many of the barbarous atrocities done against believers. He reports they were tortured, boiled in oil, cut in half, thrown to the lions, burnt alive, mocked, enslaved, and other unimaginable atrocities.

✞ For what crime were they killed? It was for the "crime" of believing, standing for, and following the teachings of God's Word. In many cases, their

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"If Christians don't tell the lost world biblical truths, how will they know?" — Brinkworth



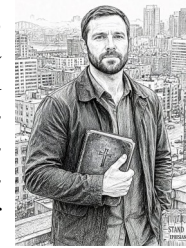
Stand Firm!

Bill Brinkworth

Being a faithful, obedient Christian has never been easy. Our early forefathers battled Satanic opposition that most modern Christians cannot even imagine. Yet, many of them persevered and stayed their course.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:" II Timothy 4:7

It was, and often still is, difficult and a sacrifice to stand against worldliness, godlessness, and ever-changing popular unbiblical social



trends. Those determined to be a godly example and do right, no matter the obstacles or consequences, often face embarrassment, being demeaned, and even danger.

However, many in those situations value righteousness more, and they will still stand no matter the humiliation and

consequences they may face. Many have even lost their lives rather than surrendering the standards and beliefs they held.

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Christians today, both in America and throughout the world, have so much for which to be grateful. Our faith, Bible, doctrines, and freedoms were secured at a high price paid by our Christian predecessors. It cost many of them their lives and much suffering, yet we take for granted what believers of the past had to pay dearly for and place little value on our Christian heritage.

Believers should not be surprised if they face persecution, as their namesake, Jesus Christ the Son of God, also received much. His righteousness and exposure of false religions were so grievous to the followers of man-made worship that they ensured the Saviour was beaten, ridiculed, mocked, and eventually

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Paul relayed how believers in his time were troubled, persecuted, and “cast down.” But, through all their trials and testings, they were “not distressed,” “not in despair,” “not forsaken,” and “not destroyed.” They endured it all and kept going forward for the cause of Christ, no matter the outcome.

What would their example be if they succumbed to the enemy’s pressure? Their testimony and example to the world would be destroyed, and evilness would triumph! They stood firm on biblical principles and became the light that will shine and be remembered through spiritual darkness.

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed... 12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you.” II Corinthians 4:8-12

Those suffering saints understood that standing for what Christ died for was worth all they would suffer and give so that others could have the promise of Heaven and the opportunity to live righteously. They stood firm under pressure to stand for righteousness, no matter what happened to them.

“Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

II Cor. 4:10

However, with all the early

believers endured, they realized they were paving the way for future believers to survive and thrive. They were examples that reminded many of who Jesus is and what He endured on their behalf. Others’ salvation and living righteously is worth all that can be given for that cause.

Today, many Christians think and consider quitting being a testimony if one even hears gossip that the believer is “nuts,” or “taking what the Bible teaches too seriously.” Ridicule from others quiets the wisdom and discernment of a faithful believer.

Even the suspicion that one may face pushback on their biblical stand halts many from ever being a godly example for the world to see. The importance of “if the public is not told or shown what God says to do they will not know” has no value or concern for many!

“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” Ephesians 6:13

In a time where righteousness has been discarded and evilness is embraced, it is time for all Christians to stand firm and speak loudly of biblical standards and teachings. If we do not tell the world what the Bible teaches, how will they know? Many will eternally suffer because of Christian’s

fear of the possible consequences of sharing God’s truths!

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demise could have been avoided by a simple, verbal recanting of what they believed. They did not even have to believe what they said.

Millions of men, women, and children died for their faith in the past. The walls of Rome’s catacombs and other hidden places reveal how many lived and died in fear of being caught and tortured for their beliefs. Many had to worship in secret places for fear of being killed or imprisoned for attending a church service.

Landmark’s Baptist College’s collection of ancient Bibles has a Bible with fire-scorched pages. It was plucked out of the flames that burned its owner. He refused to denounce his faith in Christ and His Word, and the man was burnt to death. Today, his Bible is preserved as a reminder of what Christ and His Word meant to some and how many died for reading or living God’s way.

With the freedom that most have today, many professing Christians do not live for Christ, let alone die for Him. It is easy to attend a nearby church, yet countless excuses are given by those not attending.

Most households contain at least one copy of the Word of God. However, few have

bothered to read it. Baptistries are now heated and always available, yet few follow the Lord in believer’s baptism. Although we are quickly losing our religious freedoms in the United States, it is still possible for a believer to obey the Lord’s command and tell others how to go to Heaven, yet few do.

What does your faith in Christ mean to you? Does God’s Word mean so much that you read it faithfully and would not sway from its teaching? Is the price Christ paid on the cross for our salvation so precious to you that you are determined to live for Him, no matter the cost socially or monetarily? Are the Bible’s truths so important to you that you share them with others no matter the cost in time, money, or others’ opinions?

We are nearing an era’s end when many lived their faith in Christ and shared it with others without paying a high price. However, because many have not stood up for their beliefs and freedoms, the ungodly are taking away those liberties.

For most of us, compared to what our predecessors have paid for their religious convictions, the cost to us has been minimal. That fact may change shortly.

Will you be willing to pay the price for your faith, no matter what it is? Many say they will die for their faith, but for most of us, God only requires that we live for Him. Are you living boldly for Him today?