

Christian Persecution as Explained by Jesus (Matthew 5:10-12)

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About ten years ago, an occasional paper titled “The Persecuted Church” was presented at the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization. That paper reminded its hearers that the original Lausanne Conference in 1974 had asked for scholars to study “the relationship between human suffering in general, suffering for Christ’s sake, and Christ’s own suffering.”¹ Three decades after the original call, the Lausanne Conference again asked for scholars to address the crisis of Christian persecution, saying, “There is clearly a need for deeper theological reflection on the issues pertaining to suffering, persecution, martyrdom, religious freedom and human rights, and an appropriate Christian response.”² What Lausanne is requesting is nothing less than what the Christian church has attempted to provide throughout her history: an explanation for why the righteous suffer on account of Christ.

About 1,800 years ago, the church father Tertullian was compelled to offer a defense of Christians in the face of the persecution they were suffering. Keeping his keen wit, Tertullian both defended Christians and mocked their persecutors, saying,

If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, “Away with the Christians to the lion!” What! shall you give such multitudes to a single beast? Pray, tell me how many calamities befell the world and particular cities before Tiberius reigned—before the coming, that is, of Christ?³

Like Tertullian before him, Augustine, the famous Bishop of Hippo, was compelled in his own day to offer a similar defense of the faithful. The major purpose of Augustine’s *City of God* was to defend the Christian faith in the Roman Empire after the sacking of Rome by barbarians in the early fifth century. Rome was again blaming Christians for every calamity and justifying persecution against them on that account. So Augustine wrote, “With what effrontery, then, with what assurance, with what impudence, with what folly, or rather insanity, do they refuse to impute these disasters to their own gods, and impute the present to our Christ!”⁴

Another thousand years after Augustine, in the time of the Reformation, John Calvin was also compelled to defend Christians against the charges brought against them (and the persecution those charges fueled). In the preface to his *Institutes*, Calvin implored King Francis to realize that the doctrines being taught by the Reformers were biblical doctrines. Calvin pleaded with the king to recognize the injustice of the persecution and to put it to an end. Sounding much like Augustine and Tertullian before him, Calvin said,

...how great is the malice that would ascribe to the very word of God itself the odium either of seditions, which wicked and rebellious men stir up against it, or of sects, which impostors excite, both of them in opposition to its teaching! Yet this is no new example. Elijah was asked if it was not he who was troubling Israel (1 Kings 18:17). To the Jews, Christ was seditious (Luke 23:5; John 19:7ff.). The charge of stirring up the people was laid against the apostles (Acts 24:5ff.). What else are they doing who blame us today for all the disturbances, tumults, and contentions that boil up against us? Elijah taught us what we ought to reply to such charges: it is not we who either spread errors abroad or incite tumults; but it is they who contend against God’s power (1 Kings 18:18).⁵

As Calvin so poignantly notes, defending Christians against persecution is no new thing. From Christ to Stephen to the Apostles, the early church

fathers, the Reformers, or the Baptists in “the new world,” Christians have always been at the root of controversy and have repeatedly re-learned the lesson Paul and Barnabas taught Christ’s followers at Lystra: “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”⁶

Tertullian, Augustine, and Calvin demonstrate through history what Jesus, John, and Paul experienced personally: Persecution is not an anomaly for Christians; it is rather the norm. The apostle Paul offered his pastoral protégé Timothy this sure promise: “Indeed all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”⁷ Paul could not have made the point more plainly: Christians will always be persecuted.

Now that the church has extended its witness of Christ for 2,000 years past Paul, we can affirm this same reality throughout history. Christians have been (and remain today) a persecuted people. In November 2012, German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, absorbed a modicum of ridicule from European leaders for her statement that Christians today are the most widely persecuted minority in the world. Since that time, reports have surfaced corroborating her claim that Christianity is the most persecuted religion in the world.⁸ Christians today—just as in times past—are still being blamed for societal ills and still face the wrath of men, men who unjustly charge Christians with sedition, while they themselves contend against God’s power.

This essay explores biblically the dynamic of Christian persecution. The article is an attempt to define persecution from Christ’s instructions to his disciples in Matthew 5:10-12. I intend to demonstrate that persecution is, as Calvin said, a contention against God’s power. Specifically, persecution is a retaliatory action against the righteousness of God in Christ, who is proclaimed and represented by his followers. The reasons Christians have always faced persecution and the reason they will suffer until Christ’s return is simple: Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has established the kingdom of God and now reigns in righteousness over heaven and earth. Jesus is at root the ultimate provocateur of Christian persecution. The world despised and rejected Jesus when he first walked the earth, and the world (as the Lausanne Conference notes) remains hostile to him still.

The New Testament portrays Jesus as preparing his disciples for the reality of persecution from the very early parts of his ministry. Consider what he taught, for example, in Matthew 5:10-12:

Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of

me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (NASB).”

Jesus instructed his followers from the beginning of his ministry to understand their suffering persecution as a blessing, even to rejoice and be glad on these occasions of suffering. Is there any doubt that Jesus expected his followers to suffer persecution? A further study of Matthew 5:10-12 explains why—from the beginning—there has always been this on-going expectation of persecution for the follower of Christ.

Formally, Matthew 5:10-12 may contain a ninth Beatitude.⁹ Notice that within this passage, there is a change of address. At first, Jesus is speaking in a general third person form: *Those who have been persecuted ... theirs is the kingdom*. But, in Matthew 5:11, Jesus changes to the second person: *Blessed are you when...*. This change from third person plural to second person plural shifts the conversation to direct address by the speaker. In other words, Jesus lets his followers know he is not telling them something that will be happening “out there” to some group of future Christians in some generic sense. He is telling them that this persecution will be happening “to you.” Jesus turns the conversation from general realities to specific application for the *you all* who are being addressed. Matthew 5:10-12, then, is the first place in the New Testament which offers an explanation of why followers of Christ will suffer persecution. Thus, a substantial analysis of that passage is necessary for any who would wish to understand more fully the dynamic of Christian persecution.

Analysis of Matthew 5:10-12

The fact of a relationship between kingdom people and persecution is visible in Matthew 5:10-12. In verse 10, the kingdom is said to belong to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Matthew 5:10-12, in fact, offers three aspects which abide at the core of a biblical definition of persecution. The three aspects of Christian persecution are (1) Christ; (2) Christ’s kingdom; and (3) his righteousness. This triumvirate of Christian terminology explains what will be referred to as *the regnal-righteousness* dynamic of Christian persecution. This regnal righteousness dynamic asserts that persecution is always rooted in the presence of Christ who has begun his reign as king over heaven and earth (Matt 28:18-20). This king (and kingdom) has come “in the salvation through judgment accomplished by the messiah for the glory of God.”¹⁰

As king, Christ establishes the righteousness of God on the earth, which

is to say, he asserts divine authority and demands complete allegiance, as any good and godly sovereign should (2 Sam 8:15). Christ commands allegiance to God. Discipleship begins with teaching would-be followers to obey everything Jesus taught (Matt 28:20). And discipleship includes the promise that the king will never pass away. Christ remains present with his people. Christ's presence is manifested in and through his people who walk in his righteousness, having learned obedience to him. He remains present with his followers through time (28:20). Therefore, any definition of Christian persecution derived from Christ's instruction in the Sermon on the Mount will need to take account of the reigning righteousness of Christ.

“Because of Me”

The followers of Christ are persecuted because of Christ. One can see the seamless merging of Christ, kingdom, and righteousness, in Matthew 5:10-11. In verse 10, the persecution is on account of righteousness (*heneken dikaiosunēs*), and in verse 11 it happens because of Christ (*heneken emou*, [“because of me”]), “for following Jesus is the path of righteousness.”¹¹ Continuing with this notion that Christ, kingdom, and righteousness remain inseparable in Matthew, Christ speaks in chapter 6 with authority on behalf of the kingdom of heaven and promises rewards from the Father in heaven. He teaches the disciples to pray to the Father, “Thy kingdom come” (6:10). They are considered already to be members of the kingdom and children of the Father when they are instructed thus to pray. Christ teaches his followers to avoid anxiety by seeking his kingdom and righteousness (6:33), of which, again, they are already partakers (hence, the use of the present *este* in 5:11). Matthew 7 includes more allusions to the Law, the Prophets, and the kingdom and concludes with Christ's teaching the disciples how to make sure they are participating in and manifesting kingdom life even though rain, wind, and floods may come. These meteorological metaphors picture the trouble to come, at least partially referring to persecution. If those hearing Christ are citizens of his kingdom, they are the ones building their lives upon the rock which will stand (even through persecution).¹² Following the narrow way prescribed by Christ and building one's life upon the rock may, in fact, bring the rains and flood of persecution on account of Christ.

The translation of *heneken emou*, “because of me” or “on account of me,” in Matthew 5:11 demonstrates the regnal righteousness dynamic of persecution in three ways. First, and most noticeably, the use of the personal pronoun *emou* links the persecution of the kingdom people (v 10) direct-

ly to a personal source. The person to whom the persecution is ultimately linked is neither the persecutor nor the one being persecuted. Rather, the root provocateur of persecution is Christ. The exact cause of persecution is not the presence of obedient disciples. The precise cause is Christ himself. If persecution depended upon the obedience of Christ's disciples, there may never be a blessing given, considering that all of the disciples failed to demonstrate allegiance consistently, whether it were Peter rebuking the Lord (16:22) or all of the disciples faltering in faith (17:20). The promise of persecution does not rest so much with the certainty of faithful disciples as it rests with the certainty of Christ abiding with his followers (18:20; 25:31-46; 28:20). Christ's presence—regal and righteous—will continue to offend individuals and authorities, thus ensuring the continued persecution of his followers. Here is displayed the full weight of the “on account of me.” The disciples will need to continue to learn the way of righteousness (6:33). They will need to continue to seek forgiveness where they have fallen short of faithfulness (6:12, 15). Indeed, they will need to continue the practice of the Lord's Supper (26:26-30). So, the persecution of the disciples is assured not on the faithfulness of Christ's followers, but on the personal basis of Jesus Christ himself.

Second, the “on account of me” in verse 11 emphasizes that Christ is not to be considered separately from his authority. The fact that the particular person implied in the pronoun is the Christ who teaches with authority (7:28-29) links the persecution to that authority with which this Christ teaches. The authority with which he speaks is authority bound up with the nature of who he is. The authority possessed by Christ is regal authority. According to Matthew, he is a reigning king. In other words, the “of me” referred to in the genitive preposition *emou* is “of” the Son of David, Immanuel, the King of the Jews—all references of Christ made in the gospel prior to Matthew 5:11, references which continue through to the end of the gospel which pictures Christ as having all authority over heaven and earth, as Jesus himself proclaims in 28:18—“All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (NIV). Such a conclusion to the gospel is significant considering that the first chapter (even the first verse) offered allusions to the final king.¹³ The later chapters of Matthew picture Christ as being mocked for his claims to kingship (27:27-31; 27:37-44).

In the end, Matthew affirms that indeed the kingdom is not one belonging merely to the Jews or even to the world. All authority in heaven and earth belongs to this Jesus. So, if the persecution which the disciples suffer refers back to the person of Christ, then it refers back to the Christ who is

the ever-present, sovereign king of heaven and earth. While it is likely the case that Christ's original audience may not have understood all the implications of his claims to kingship, it is also true that the original recipients of Matthew's gospel had the notion of the kingship authority of Christ spelled out for them from the beginning of the gospel to its post-resurrection end. Christ's abiding authority is central to Matthew's gospel.

Third, the phrase "on account of me" in verse eleven works in conjunction with verse ten to indicate that the persecution of the disciples happens *because of* their authoritative teacher and king, Jesus Christ. The improper preposition *heneken* is most commonly translated in Matthew as "for the sake of."¹⁴ The slightly varying senses in which the preposition is rendered either "for the sake of" or "because of" can be seen in the difference between its usage in verses ten and eleven. In verse ten, those are to be congratulated who have been persecuted *for the sake of* righteousness, while in verse eleven those are to be congratulated who are persecuted *because of* Christ. The rendering *for the sake of* in verse ten is the outward expression (the fruit) of pursuing—or putting on display—righteousness through obedience to Christ. It is more occasional than causal. One might understand this as faith in action. Matthew loads the gospel with illustrations of such faith in action.¹⁵

In verse eleven, the *because of* refers to the origin or the root cause of persecution; namely, the authoritative Christ. The distinction in view is necessary to see both sides of the persecution equation. On the one hand, the outlook of pursuing righteousness provides the occasion for drawing attention to the manner in which Christ's authority is represented in the life and actions of his followers. On the other hand, the persecution that arises against Christ's followers proves to have its origins of offense in the presence of the authoritative Christ himself. The distinction between the two is helpful, but even more helpful is the relation between the two. The righteousness is tantamount to the person at root in the causal offense of persecution.

In addition, such clarifications concerning Christ and his righteousness will prove to be significant determinants of whether a particular instance is classified properly as persecution. From Matthew 5:10-12, we see that the righteousness of Christ is on display through the actions of those who by faith obey him, having truly become disciples. Having been delivered from their allegiances to other powers, the followers of Christ are now allied with him. Or, better, the people of the kingdom "are engaged and commanded by Jesus to do what they ought to do. As salt and light they *represent* and *proclaim* the righteousness fulfilled by Jesus ... , but they do not create it them-

selves.”¹⁶ The kingdom is his. The righteousness is his. In Matthew 5:13-16, the followers are first called light, then commanded to shine. They are not told to shine in order to become light. The disciples are first called to Christ (4:19) then given instructions for obedience. The nature of the obedience demonstrates the righteous authority of Christ, not the authority or righteousness of his followers. In this view of Matthew 5:10-12, persecution exists as a retaliatory action against the Christ of regnal righteousness. Christ, his kingdom, and his righteousness prove ultimate in explaining why there exists this perpetual propensity for Christians to face persecution.

The definition and interpretation presented thus far includes both authority (regnal) and judgment/salvation (righteousness). Both terms, *regnal* and *righteousness*, are necessary and inseparable. Some may suspect such an emphasis on the *regnal* authority of Christ makes too much of Christ’s authority and not enough of his righteousness, particularly in light of the emphasis on *righteousness* in 5:10; yet the regnal emphasis must not be minimized because it reflects the overall emphasis of Matthew’s gospel, as has been shown. While righteousness forms a significant framing structure within the gospel (3:15; 21:32), the entire gospel is itself framed by the authority of Christ (1:1; 28:18-20). Structurally, the righteousness which abides in the kingdom abides first in the person of the king. The king/kingdom come first, then the righteousness—though the two are integral and cannot be divided, again explaining 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God *and* his righteousness.”

Tertullian, Augustine, and Calvin each recognized in their own ways that there was inherent friction between God and lesser authorities who contend against him. The significance of maintaining the ultimacy of an authoritative Christ can be demonstrated by the manner in which some Christians have sought (unlike Augustine or Calvin) to accommodate to hostile cultures around them by adopting a dualistic interpretation of authority, viewing Christ as the authority over the spiritual realm (salvation) and “Caesar” the authority over the temporal (service). Stassen and Gushee chronicle the history of Christianity in this negative regard,¹⁷ tracing the phenomenon back to Justin Martyr’s bifurcated view of Matthew 22:17-21, from which Justin argued before Emperor Antoninus Pius that worship was due to God but service due to Caesar, who was the king and ruler of men.¹⁸ By now, the preceding engagement with Matthew 5:10-12 should have dispelled any notion of dualism in the matter of being persecuted on account of Christ. The short summary of what has been shown thus far is that Christ (and regnal

righteousness) is the cause of the persecution, while the obedient display of Christ's righteousness provides the occasion for it.

The distinction is only being pressed here to understand the persecution dynamic better. Both the righteousness and the authority in consideration belong to Christ, the righteous king, and, thus, are ultimately inseparable. However, Christians will surely remember that it is the followers of Christ who are mistreated, flogged, cast out from the synagogues, and persecuted by those hostile to Christ. And so, the persecution comes against those who trust Christ and therefore are seeking his kingdom and his righteousness. Such seeking displays light, and—to borrow a Johannine phrase—the darkness hates the light (John 3:19). The presence of Christ abides with his people, and persecution still flares up against Christ, even if the suffering is inflicted upon those who obey him.

Whereas some may question the emphasis being placed on kingship authority, others, no doubt, will question the emphasis being placed on righteousness in this definition of Christian persecution. Such questioning of the prominence of righteousness is particularly apropos in this instance, given the general consensus that Matthew uses *righteousness* in a radically different way from Paul and other New Testament writers. Therefore, this regnal righteousness definition of Christian persecution must be able to account for itself in the larger debate concerning *righteousness* in Matthew. Because of the prominent role righteousness plays in explaining Christian persecution, a further (albeit brief) consideration of righteousness in Matthew is in order.

Righteousness and Kingship Authority

Extensive study concerning *righteousness* in Matthew has been undertaken by Benno Przybylski.¹⁹ Przybylski argues for a provisional, functional concept of righteousness in the gospel of Matthew. By provisional, he means that “the concept of righteousness is used as a teaching principle leading from the known (contemporary Jewish teaching) to the unknown (the teaching of Jesus).”²⁰ By functional, he means that righteousness provides a particular function, namely, bridging a knowledge gap from a Jewish understanding to Jesus's understanding. According to Przybylski, *righteousness* was a borrowed Jewish term which could be employed by Matthew until the fuller realization of discipleship might take root and be employed by Christ's followers. In this view, *righteousness* in Matthew is framed not so much by the literature of the Old Testament—and certainly not by post-Reformation, Pauline interpretations of the term; rather, the framework for righteousness

is found in the inter-testamental Dead Sea Scrolls and Tannaitic literature, which reflect significant development from the Old Testament. So, Przybylski argues that there are distinct ways the gospel of Matthew demonstrates this development, a development which ends up leading to what he describes as the provisional function of righteousness in Matthew.

Przybylski argues from the seven occurrences of *dikaïosunē* in Matthew that each of these seven occurrences takes place in a polemical context and/or a context in which there are non-disciples; thus, he holds that there is no situation in the seven in which the context is didactic, uniquely comprised of disciples. Of course, five of the seven are in the Sermon on the Mount, and the other two occurrences concern the fulfillment of righteousness in relation to John the Baptist. Przybylski's point in arguing from these contextual clues is that they are indicators of the anachronistic nature of *dikaïosunē*, the term being one which Matthew viewed no longer apropos for disciples. According to Przybylski, Matthew (in its final redaction) was, in a sense, phasing out the Jewish concept of *righteousness* and replacing it with the Jesus concept of *disciple*. However, this assertion relies upon a supposed de-emphasizing of the Jewish concept of *righteousness* throughout the gospel of Matthew.²¹ That claim is dubious.

While Przybylski notes that Matthew's gospel employs *dikaïosunē* only seven times, he downplays the rather significant fact that Matthew's gospel employs the adjectival form *dikaïos* seventeen times,²² which is more often than any other New Testament book, a fact that leads Seebass to conclude to the contrary that the "doctrine of righteousness is central to [Matthew's] message."²³ It does not seem appropriate to say there is a de-emphasis of righteousness in Matthew. Instead, one might say there is a "re-emphasis" of the subject. Roland Deines makes this assertion and says that this re-emphasis of righteousness hearkens back to the claim that Jesus is coming to save his people from their sins (1:21).²⁴ Agreeing with Carter that the name *Jesus* is to be connected to *Joshua*, Deines insists that Matthew is re-emphasizing righteousness in light of the coming of the Messiah: "The name is programmatic, and the question is to be raised: Why do the people of Israel need a 'new' forgiveness for their sins? Is this not right from the beginning of the Gospel at least an indirect hint as to how Matthew understood the Torah and the Messiah's main task?"²⁵ According to Deines, Matthew fleshes out the need for forgiveness and demonstrates that the forgiveness is not to come from the Torah but from Christ. Righteousness, then, is central to Matthew's message, as it is to be found not in the Law but in the Messiah himself. Deines understands (as has been asserted throughout this paper)

that the righteousness in question relates inextricably back to Jesus himself.

Further, Przybylski denies that righteousness is related to the gift of God and believes, instead, it must refer to the demand of God upon man.²⁶ But Deines' point concerning John the Baptist and righteousness should not to be overlooked here:²⁷ The way of righteousness proclaimed by the Baptist is clearly the way of God's righteousness. Christ, too, calls followers into it. Matthew 3:15 is much better understood as the opening part of an *inclusio* with 21:32, thus identifying the first and last uses of the noun *dikaiousunē* in Matthew with John the Baptist.²⁸ Significantly, the original occurrence of *dikaiousunē* in Matthew (3:15) takes place for Christ (*plērōsai pasan dikaiosunē*). For Przybylski to be correct, the concept of *fulfillment* would have to be reconciled with a de-emphasis. Deines appears on stronger ground asserting that Matthew offers a re-emphasis of righteousness in light of the coming of the Messiah—not a de-emphasis.

Beyond the counter-questioning of particular texts, another question arises for Przybylski's assertion of a de-emphasizing of righteousness. Is Przybylski correct in asserting that the absence of *dikaiousunē* in didactic, disciple-only contexts proves that Matthew's gospel hopes to transition from *dikaiousunē* to *disciple*? Perhaps not. Consider, for instance, the contextual work of Dennis Hamm, who has written specifically on the context of Jesus's offering of the Beatitudes.²⁹ According to his analysis of the Beatitudes presented in Matthew and Luke, Hamm concludes that Jesus speaks to the disciples (a group including the inner twelve) in the presence of a larger group gathered around. As he says, "The *immediate* audience is the many followers implied by the word 'disciples,' including the subset of the recently chosen twelve apostles; but Jesus addresses as well the less committed members of this ingathering of the people of Israel, in whose hearing the words are spoken."³⁰ If Hamm is correct, then more pressure is put on Przybylski's thesis, as the context of the Sermon on the Mount (in which are five of his seven key texts) may, in fact, be one of addressing the disciples didactically, even though other people are included in a larger crowd. Hamm likens the situation to that of Luke 20:45, "And in the hearing of all the people, he said *to his disciples*" (ESV). Even common practice today affirms the reality of such a teaching context. Preachers understand they are addressing Christians and teaching them doctrine, even though—in all likelihood—unbelievers are in the audience as well, thus indicating that a didactic message might also prove to be a polemical one as well. The aim is still didactic.

In addition, the Sermon on the Mount includes five significant references to righteousness by Christ, and Christ is pictured later in the Gospel as

judging all humankind (Matt 25) and having all authority in heaven and earth. Significantly, the judgment will include whether or not a given individual is partaker of a righteousness which exceeds that of the Pharisees (5:20). Given such contexts, one may see the tendentious nature of Przybylski's thesis. Along this line of inquisition, the reader may notice, too, that Przybylski does not explain the shift from third person to second person in Matthew 5:11. Clearly, in Matthew 5:11, Jesus is not alerting non-disciples to the threat of persecution against them on his account. This warning of 5:11 must be addressed to disciples—disciples to whom he speaks much about righteousness. Both disciples and non-disciples may be addressed in the Sermon on the Mount, but the disciples are specifically instructed in how that righteousness relates to their persecution. Would it make sense for Jesus to forewarn them about persecution for the sake of righteousness if righteousness were passing away? The Beatitudes assume an enduring significance for righteousness.

Przybylski's thesis appears overburdened by its desire to demonstrate dissimilarity with regard to Pauline interpretations of righteousness. In the beginning of his work, Przybylski states, "In comparison to the Pauline literature, the concept of righteousness has an entirely different function in the Gospel of Matthew."³¹ By the end of his work, Przybylski states that Matthew and Paul agree on the nature of salvation as a gift of God, but he disagrees that the dual nature of righteousness—as gift and demand—is apropos for Matthew in the manner it is found in Paul.³² A strong case can be made against Przybylski's claims. Roland Deines has made such a case for understanding righteousness as passive in Matthew and not related exclusively to demand.³³ Deines argues, "Starting from verse 5:17, righteousness, which is at the same time demanded and presupposed in verse 20, means a new reality that is possible through Jesus and—because it is available from now on—also necessary for entering the kingdom of God."³⁴ While Deines still understands a role for demand, his demand is quite unlike Przybylski's. Deines is clear to point out that righteousness in Matthew is a gift which circumscribes the demand. As he says, "What is demanded is a different quality of life according to the kingdom of God that is about to appear. It is the eschatological, overflowing rich righteousness that Jesus fulfilled and made available to his disciples that from now on alone opens the way into the kingdom of God."³⁵ Otherwise, one might expect the Pharisees to applaud the righteousness of the followers of Christ. The Pharisees, of course, do not applaud the righteousness of Christ or his followers. Instead, they persecute it (5:10; 10:17). Scaer points out that if the disciples are expected

to meet certain demands of righteousness quantitatively in 5:20, then “their new allegiance required stricter moral observance than the Pharisee-dominated synagogues. If they were expected to excel where the Pharisees failed and suffer persecution, shouldn’t their moral adherence engender admiration from the Pharisees?”³⁶ Deines asserts instead that the notion of Jesus calling for a “better” ethic is to be rejected in favor of “Jesus-righteousness,” a righteousness impossible apart from the person Jesus Christ.³⁷

Allison and Davies draw upon Przybylski’s work in their interpretation of righteousness in Matthew. They find our primary text (Matt 5:10) “particularly weighty” in maintaining a non-Pauline posture with regard to righteousness, saying, “Righteousness cannot, in this verse, have anything to do with divine vindication, nor can it mean justification or be God’s gift. It is, rather, something disciples have, and they are persecuted because of it. Hence, it is recognizable behavior of some sort.”³⁸ Even Donald Hagner, who takes issue with Przybylski on at least three of the seven interpretations of the noun *dikaïosunē* in Matthew, argues for an ethical understanding of righteousness in 5:10, believing that the ethical righteousness of the persecuted is the issue, though he acknowledges that the “righteousness is associated with relationship to Jesus.”³⁹ However, what is clear from the study of persecution thus far is that this relationship to Jesus is not a side note to the main issue of ethical righteousness. With Deines, we affirm that Jesus-righteousness is the main issue. Because Jesus-righteousness is the main issue, the persecution of his followers can be called persecution for the sake of righteousness or persecution on account of him. Rather than saying the persecuted disciples are so treated because of their ethical righteousness, Matthew appears to be saying of these disciples that “they *represent* and *proclaim* the righteousness fulfilled by Jesus (5:10; 3:15), but they do not create it themselves.”⁴⁰

Also, is it not possible that those who believe in the gift of justification—those who have heard the message of God’s salvation—would have actions which follow such beliefs? If so, then the actions are representations of the righteousness behind them, which is Christ’s. Even more, is it possible that the king and his kingdom are not passing away but are actually still present with the kingdom people (Matt 28:20)? If so, then the persecution for the sake of righteousness is persecution on account of Jesus—on account of his kingdom and his righteousness. The conclusion of Allison and Davies seems to be derived from their *a priori* conclusion that righteousness in 5:10 *must be* a reference to a demand for right conduct required by God. However, this conclusion is not warranted if our earlier assessment of the regnal righteous-

ness dynamic is taken into account. In the regnal dynamic, the persecution of 5:10 *for righteousness' sake* is inseparably related to the persecution of 5:11 *on account of Christ*. The question comes back to the relationship between the persecution of 5:10 and that of 5:11. The significance of this relationship to righteousness—very important for understanding persecution—is also not irrelevant in the present debate concerning the Pauline perspective on justification.

Righteousness as New Testament Nexus

Such a brief consideration of the immense debate surrounding the Pauline doctrine of justification is obviously insufficient in terms of moving that particular debate forward. The subject is broached here only because of the strong relationship Matthew's gospel sees between Christ, righteousness, and persecution. Such a relationship between the king and righteousness has recently been propounded by Peter Stuhlmacher, who argues that "the Pauline doctrine of justification is the doctrine about the implementation of God's righteousness through Christ for the entire creation."⁴¹ The hint of regnal overtones is unmistakable in this definition. It would be difficult also to miss the regnal character of the Christ in Matthew. Such a regnal-righteousness nexus is found both in Paul and in Matthew. With regard to righteousness in the present debate, Stuhlmacher argues that "since the time of Second Isaiah, the end-time hopes of Israel were concentrated upon the expectation that God would soon do a new thing (cf. Is 43:19; 51:6; 65:17)."⁴² Paul undoubtedly knew such expectation, but his understanding of it was altered significantly by his encounter with Christ and his subsequent call to be the apostle to the Gentiles, preaching to them the kingdom of God. Paul's missionary service in the cause of preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the Gentiles is evidence enough for Stuhlmacher that the justification question exists in affinity with the in-breaking of the kingdom. Quoting Käsemann approvingly, Stuhlmacher concludes that "the issue in justification is none other than the kingdom of God that Jesus preached."⁴³ Again, Stuhlmacher concludes, "For the apostle, the righteousness of God, the Christ of God, the people of God and the kingdom of God all belong inseparably together."⁴⁴

In a very similar way, Matthew 5:10-12 also asserts that the Christ of God, the people of God, and the righteousness of God all belong inseparably together. Obedience to Christ is a sign of their relationship to Christ, but it explains neither the origin nor the outcome of righteousness. Obedience may in fact occasion persecution, but it does not cause it.

Stuhlmacher at least demonstrates the viability of viewing righteousness in affinity with the regnal Christ in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament. If righteousness, then, is related to the regnal Christ in Paul, then why would it be out of the question for it to be so related in Matthew? The Christ of Matthew came preaching the kingdom, too (Matt 4:17). As Carter has shown, there are definite hints of Christ in relation to the kingdom beginning in the very first verse of the Gospel.⁴⁵ Mark Seifrid—working in this instance from Stuhlmacher—asserts this very proposition. He says that Jesus’s “announcement of the kingdom of God parallels Paul’s declaration of the revelation of the ‘righteousness of God.’ In fact, the terms criss-cross one another: Paul speaks of the kingdom of God as the presence of righteousness (Rom. 14:17), just as Matthew testifies to Jesus’ witness to the coming ‘righteousness of God’ (Matt. 6:33).”⁴⁶ Biblically, this nexus would obviate the need to disconnect the Pauline doctrine of Justification from that found in Matthew. From a consideration of the extant biblical data, there appears to be at least similarities between righteousness in Paul and righteousness in Matthew, particularly with reference to the kingdom.

Righteousness and the kingdom go together—as Stuhlmacher notes—with Christ and his followers. When the regnal dynamic thus far exposed is allowed to speak with regard to righteousness, then the righteousness of the persecution in Matthew 5:10 can be viewed as directly linked to the persecution on account of Christ in Matthew 5:11. Those acting in allegiance to Christ display both the righteousness and the kingship authority of Christ. In this way, those persecuted can be said to be persecuted either for righteousness’ sake or on account of Christ. Utilizing the relationship proffered by Deines, we may say that the manner in which the followers of Christ display this righteousness is both by representing and proclaiming Christ before the world. Their allegiance to Christ is not one of earning or even maintaining righteousness. It is a matter of hungering and thirsting for his righteousness. Such hungering and thirsting, such representing and proclaiming, leads Christ’s followers to be persecuted just as he was persecuted (10:16-25)—not so much for their actions as for their identification with him. In their persecutions on account of him, the followers of Christ are promised blessings. This dynamic is called here the regnal righteousness dynamic because the righteousness belongs to Christ, and the authority against which the persecutors react is the reigning authority of Christ. From this dynamic, it begins to appear more clearly that persecution is a hostile action—violence or slander—undertaken in response to the revelation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Those who “live and

walk in the light of the Lord”⁴⁷ reflect his regnal righteousness and, so, are persecuted on account of Him. Here is the heart of the matter.

Objections and Further Clarification

Of course, not all commentators will agree concerning this regnal righteousness serving as a nexus between verses 10 and 11. Robert Gundry states, “We have no reason to distinguish between righteousness as the occasion of persecution and righteousness as the cause of persecution.”⁴⁸ A strictly anthropological interpretation of *righteousness* in 5:10 would obviate any need to distinguish the occasion of persecution from its cause. Yet, the expectation of persecution in verse 10, *heneken* dikaiosunē, followed by the expectation in verse 11 that the persecution is “on account or because of me” calls for an explanation. It seems too simplistic to conflate Christ and righteousness into an anthropological construct. Are the two strictly parallel? In what way is Christ parallel to righteousness? What is the relationship between the persecution of Christ’s followers and righteousness? Is the blessing for kingdom people related to ethical righteousness, to Christ, or to both? The significance of understanding this point can be seen in Boice’s comments: “There is no promise of happiness for those who are persecuted for being a nuisance, for Christians who have shown themselves to be objectionable, difficult, foolish, and insulting to their non-Christian friends. This is not the thing about which Christ was speaking.”⁴⁹ To make such a statement, one must have an understanding of what Christ is saying in setting up such a relationship between himself and righteousness with regard to persecution. Understanding precisely what is meant by the varying uses of “on account of” is important. The blessing and kingdom belong only to those whose persecution is related to Christ or to righteousness. What is the relation between the two? Gundry does not answer these questions.

As we have seen concerning *righteousness*, the primary answer is that Christ (his regnal righteousness) proves to be the origin of the persecution, while those called by him (Matt 11:27-30) act in accordance with his authority, thereby becoming objects of persecution on his account. The two uses of *heneken*, then, rather than contradicting or competing against one another, actually interpret one another. Being brought under the umbrella of Christ’s righteousness, on the one hand, leads to concrete confessions and actions which are manifest openly before the world, and, on the other hand, exposes the followers of Christ to persecution. Luz corroborates such an interpretation when he notes that the two uses of the preposition *heneken* in verses 10 and 11 “interpret each other mutually: the confession

of Christ manifests itself in deeds.”⁵⁰ Disciples will “do” the commands of Christ: “The community of followers of Jesus have the vocation to be instruments of the kingdom of God in the world in association with their Lord and under his leadership (in the post-Easter period that is assumed to be under the guidance and through the power of the Spirit of Jesus).”⁵¹ Their doing, however, is not the root cause of their persecution. The root cause is their king, Christ himself.

Again, one may object to this distinction between the occasion and the origin of the persecution in question on the grounds that in the Sermon on the Mount (6:1) Christ specifically warns against practicing *dikaiosunē* before men. How can Christ expect persecution to erupt against his followers on account of righteousness and, yet, also forbid them from displaying righteousness? When understood correctly, the warning in 6:1 supports all that has been said thus far. The warning is clarified by the phrase, *pros to theathēvai autois* (“in order to be seen by them”). The danger here is the motive, not necessarily the outward action. Christ warns that the kind of *dikaiosunē* which is practiced merely from an anthropological outlook is the *dikaiosunē* of hypocrites, sounding trumpets to be noticed anthropologically, rather than the *dikaiosunē* which belongs to the authoritative king of heaven in Matthew 5:20. Thus, Matthew 6:33 records Christ instructing his followers to seek first⁵² the kingdom of heaven and the righteousness accompanying it.⁵³ In other words, the point of righteousness is that it belongs to the sovereign Christ and is manifested in word and deed by the followers of Christ, as in Matthew 5:10-11.

Morris captures the sense of the *dikaiosunē* in question in 6:1, as he says the word “refers to any good deed that a person may do as part of his service of God ... The believer must always keep in mind that the act is righteous only if it is what it purports to be—the service of God.”⁵⁴ By *service*, Morris has in mind the same basic idea as Beasley-Murray, who equates service with ministry to both physical and spiritual needs.⁵⁵ Such service must be in Christ’s name or for Christ’s sake. The *dikaiosunē* in view, then, as was the case with Matthew 5:10, is righteousness that belongs to the kingdom of heaven, according to the will of the regnal king. Little wonder, then, that those who practice and thus are persecuted for righteousness in Matthew 5:10 are promised that they have the kingdom of heaven. The *dikaiosunē* of Matthew 5:10, like the *dikaiosunē* of 6:1, is a *dikaiosunē* which pursues the kingdom of God first and his *dikaiosunē* which accompanies it. Its origin and goal is not separated from Christ. On the basis of this righteousness,

Jesus will administer the justice of the kingdom (Matt 7:21-23; 25:31ff.). In other words, the *dikaïosunē* in view in Matthew 5:10 is the same *dikaïosunē* in view throughout the Sermon on the Mount. It is the *dikaïosunē* of God at work in the kingdom of God which is gifted to the people of God seeking to serve the commands of Christ because they believe that it is Christ who is accomplishing the kingdom purposes of God, including that which Jesus taught them to pray for in Matthew 6:10, “Let your kingdom come, your will be done, as it is in heaven so also on the earth.”

When Przybylski and others⁵⁶ insist that the righteousness of the Sermon on the Mount is only ethical, that is, actively received, they deny the very sense of the word *righteousness*. Righteousness appears to be much better explained in Matthew by relating it to Jesus Christ and the in-breaking of the kingdom of heaven rather than explicitly to moral conduct. Again, Matthew 5:20 is exceedingly important in this regard (and for understanding persecution). The righteousness that enters the kingdom is not simply a quantitatively superior (or ethically supreme) righteousness. It is righteousness of a different kind altogether from Pharisaical righteousness. Otherwise, “If ‘the blessed’ are persecuted for their righteousness (5:10), then quite logically the Pharisees, or at least those who strictly adhere to the rules of moral conduct, also would qualify for persecution.”⁵⁷ Instead, the Pharisees act as persecutors instead of persecuted. The persecuted will be those who because of Christ have an appetite and thirst for the righteousness of God. When one believes what Christ has taught in the Sermon on the Mount and so acts in the outworking of such faith, then that one is manifesting the reality of Christ, serving him and saying—through actions—that the regnal claims of Christ are true. Here in this regnal dynamic is the display of righteousness which makes one a target of persecution. Actions in obedience to the regnal Christ become a threat to other dominions and powers aligned against the righteous, reigning Christ. Hence, their actions provide occasions upon which persecutions tend to ignite.

Further Defense of The Regnal Righteousness Dynamic

Again, not all scholars agree that this regnal framework is what is being taught in Matthew. Some scholars—in light of Matthew 5:12 [cf. QL 6:23]—argue that the persecution is not regnal in nature. Instead, they build on the statement, “for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you,” maintaining that the persecution is not related primarily to Christ, his kingdom, or his righteousness. Rather, they claim persecution is related to identification with the prophets. The argument is maintained that the

Old Testament framework of Israelite rebellion and prophetic rejection is still being played out in the saga of first-century persecution. Following the categories of critical scholarship in Old Testament studies, the framework in view is not precisely Old Testament, but Deuteronomistic, and “in Deuteronomistic theology the prophets are represented primarily as preachers of repentance and, generally speaking, as rejected preachers.”⁵⁸ Thus, this view seeks to show that “the Q community responded to the onset of persecution by interpreting it in accordance with Israel’s rejected prophets”⁵⁹ in the Deuteronomistic theological perspective. On these grounds, then, the statement of identification with the prophets as found in Matthew 5:12 would be expected, and persecution would thus be explained as a continuation of Israel’s rejection of the prophets.

In response, Jarvis rightly notes that for the case to hold that persecution is paradigmatic of Israel and the prophets, then three conditions must obtain: (1) Jesus’ followers should be described as prophets; (2) Jesus’ followers should call Israel to repent; and (3) the rejection of the call to repent should be the reason for the persecution. After a full consideration of these conditions, Jarvis finds they do not obtain. First, as for whether the sayings indicate that the followers of Christ are to be considered prophets, Jarvis notes that most often the word *prophet* does not refer to a follower of Christ; that, when it does, it does not indicate that the followers of Christ are themselves to be considered prophets in the Old Testament sense of the word; and, finally, that the prophets are distinguished from the followers of Christ in several Q sayings (Q 10:24; 11:47; and 16:16 for example).

However, one must admit that Matthew 5:12 (cf. Q 6:23) could be taken to refer to the followers of Christ as prophets. The original *houtōs gar edioxsan tous prophētas tous pro humōn* may be read appositively, “For thus they persecuted the prophets, *the ones before you*,” although the text does not mandate such a reading. The text may just as well be translated, as the NASB translates it, “the prophets who were before you,” a more generic, chronological reading. Either way, the text could, in fact, be saying that in the instance of persecution the followers of Christ are acknowledged to be in some way akin to the prophets. Yet, as Jarvis notes, “It is unclear ... whether this logion means that Jesus’ hearers, when persecuted, are themselves prophets, or that in being rejected they share a fate similar to that of the faithful ones before them, namely, the prophets. If Q 6:23 is read as comparing but not equating Jesus’ followers with the prophets its value as evidence for a Deuteronomistic interpretation of persecution is somewhat limited.”⁶⁰

Significantly, the followers of Christ are never said to be in the line of the

prophets in the Sermon on the Mount. Christ's followers are referred to as "disciples" (5:1); as "the salt of the earth" (5:13); and as "the light of the world" (5:14), but never are they called *prophets*. The outstanding feature of Matthew 23:29-36 is not the on-going nature of the office of prophet, but the on-going persecution of righteousness, whether it be the persecution of Abel, Zechariah, the prophets of old, or the present followers of Christ. The line of continuity is drawn from one generation of the righteous to the next—not from one line of prophets to another. The inclusion of Abel in the list is clearly an indication that prophets as such are not as important to the author as is the righteousness they represent. Abel is not known as a prophet but as the first righteous man killed (the first *martyr* for righteousness' sake). If the question is whether *prophet* is the characteristic identification of the followers of Christ in relation to persecution in Matthew, then the answer appears to be, "No, it is not." The better case to make is that the followers of Christ are identified with his righteousness and thus are persecuted, not that they are identified with the prophets and so persecuted.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the persecution of righteousness is not persecution based on the identification of the prophets. Rather, as our consideration of Matthew 5:10-12 has shown, the persecution of righteousness is identified specifically with Christ, who is not pictured *primarily* as a prophet but, rather, as a king who teaches with authority. Christ is surely referred to as a prophet throughout the gospel of Matthew (13:53-58; 14:5; 16:14; 21:11; 21:46).⁶¹ Nevertheless, as Repschinski has said, "The confession of Peter (16:16) makes it clear that the crowd's appraisal of Jesus as prophet is inadequate."⁶² Though one may rightly argue in a minimalist sense that Christ is pictured as a prophet throughout Matthew, he would have to agree that Christ is also pictured as something more than a prophet. As Matthew 12:45 says, "something greater than Jonah is here." Even if Jesus were pictured as being a prophet like the prophet Jonah, still, his status is viewed as surpassing Jonah in its greatness. Matthew's gospel is clear on this point. The birth of this one who is greater than Jonah happened "in order to fulfill" the prophecy of Isaiah (1:22-23); the fleeing with this child to Egypt also *fulfilled* what had been spoken by Hosea according to Matthew 2:15; the slaughter of the innocent children in 2:16-18 *fulfilled* what was spoken by Jeremiah; this child's growing up in Nazareth *fulfilled* what had been spoken by prophets, according to 2:23.⁶³ This one greater than the prophet Jonah *fulfilled* the prophets (cf. 5:17). Jesus fulfilled the prophets and the Law in the righteousness of God. This Jesus Christ of Matthew is, indeed, more than a prophet. As Jervis says, "Jesus' distinguishing characteristic is that he

is intimately connected to the reign of God. Rather than his identity being tied to the prophets of the past, it is linked to God's current work of bringing in God's reign."⁶⁴ If the disciples are affiliated with one such as this, why would they prefer to be affiliated instead with Israel's prophets of old?

The concern of Matthew is the righteousness of God. Matthew is concerned about a settling of accounts for *pan haima dikaion* ("all the righteous blood" [Matt 23:35]). The mention of the prophets in Matthew 5:10-12 and Matthew 23:34-36 serves not so much to make the statement that the followers of Christ are in the line of prophets officially. Rather, this mention serves to establish the followers of Christ in a long line (dating back to Abel) of those whose righteousness has not been silent, thus occasioning persecution. After the arrival of Christ preaching the kingdom of heaven, those yielding to the authority claims of Christ would suffer persecution as their actions demonstrate both his authority over them and his loyalty to them. Thus, the persecution against them is against him and, ultimately, against the righteousness of God.

Conclusion Concerning Persecution in Matthew

Matthew's gospel presents a clear statement that the persecution of Christians happens on account of Christ. Christ was despised, rejected, condemned, and executed by sinful men when he took on flesh and made his claim to be king. In Tertullian's day, Christians were beaten, tortured, and killed by local rulers under the authority of the emperor, Septimius Severus. In Augustine's day, following the sack of Rome, there was a growing hostility toward Christians in the Roman Empire. And the recovery of the gospel during the Protestant Reformation brought both unparalleled freedoms to believers and new experiences of persecution, as Calvin tried to explain to King Francis. Persecution is a continuous stream coursing through the history of Christianity and the reason is plain: Jesus Christ has established his kingdom, vindicating the righteousness of God. The world hated Jesus when he first made righteous claims of divine authority, and the world hates him still. His demand for righteousness is still unbearable to the unbelieving heart.

Consequently, persecution persists against Christ. Thus, Christians have a constant need for more men like Augustine, Calvin, and Tertullian standing tall to defend the plight of the righteous suffering, but—despite an abundance of persecution taking place—there is presently a dearth of scholarship in this area.⁶⁵ The absence of such scholarship must not delude Christians into assuming the absence of such suffering. Persecution is hap-

pening to horrific degrees in countries all across the earth.⁶⁶ Christians need to answer Lausanne's call to give more attention, more study, to the topic of persecution. More advocacy needs to take place on behalf of the persecuted bride of Christ. "However counterintuitive it may seem in light of popular stereotypes of Christianity as a powerful and sometimes oppressive social force, Christians today indisputably are the most persecuted religious body on the planet, and too often their new martyrs suffer in silence."⁶⁷ As long as Christ remains present with his people and true to himself, there will remain persecution on account of him. This article has attempted to explain why. Hopefully, the article will also stir others to continue the long Christian heritage of defending the righteous against the persecutions they suffer.

Further Application of the Definition

Further study of Christian persecution is needed both from a biblical/theological perspective and from an ethical/applied theology vantage point. Most of the study which has been done has been done more from the perspective of martyrdom than from the logically prior perspective of persecution. For instance, G. W. Bowersock has tried to demonstrate that the Christian ideal of martyrdom has been adopted largely from the Roman-Imperial context out of which it originally arose.⁶⁸ Likewise, A. J. Droge and J. D. Tabor have sought to define the Christian martyrdom tradition contextually, utilizing the Roman "Noble Death" concept to explain the Christian's willingness to die.⁶⁹ Robin Darling Young sought to demonstrate that contextualization resulted in the formation of martyrdom as public liturgy,⁷⁰ while Daniel Boyarin has sought to prove the derivation of Christian martyrdom from a somewhat synergistic struggle for identity with ancient Judaism.⁷¹ Candida Moss has argued that the entire martyrdom history is actually a myth.⁷² Each of these studies is indicative of the literature extant related to persecution. By and large, the literature focuses on martyrdom rather than on persecution itself, with little concern for the actual instructions Christ gave to his followers. The result of such a focus is to move the conversation too quickly to the question of whether the dead Christian was a martyr. One can easily see through church history how this martyrological perspective developed; however, the New Testament emphasis, as reflected in this study from Matthew 5:10-12, is to aid the Christian in knowing whether his or her particular suffering is persecution. The question of whether or not someone died as a martyr ought to be preceded by the prior question of whether he or she was persecuted—and whether it was persecution on account of Christ which led to death. Most scholarship focuses on martyrdom with-

out first addressing persecution. Persecution study should come first and should form the structure and framework out of which martyrology is then discussed. But studies in martyrdom far outdistance studies in persecution.

To his credit, Josef Ton has sought to develop an actual theology of persecution.⁷³ The conclusions of this paper differ significantly from Ton's assertion that the New Testament portrays persecution as suffering intended to prove leadership characteristics in believers who will then be rewarded with various levels of leadership in Christ's eternal reign. Ton's thesis is burdened by questions of how the faithfulness of the suffering disciples proves worth or value in the kingdom. Ton's view of kingdom rewards ends with a turning of attention away from the work of Christ toward the work of his followers—none of whom proved completely trustworthy along the way.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Ton's work is similar to the conclusions of this study in two significant ways. First, he emphasizes the importance of the in-breaking of Christ's kingdom for understanding persecution. Second, he focuses attention on persecution itself rather than subsuming that topic within the subject of martyrdom. Further, his work shows that there are pertinent questions relating to suffering and rewards. So, again, more work needs to be done in biblical and theological studies relating to persecution.

Along with more study of the biblical, theological theme of persecution, Christians need to work quickly and diligently to fulfill Lausanne's original cry for help. The world is not friendlier to Christ and Christianity now than it was in 1974 when Lausanne made its original plea. In fact, The Pew Research Center recently published its latest index of global religious hostilities, claiming that 76% of the world's population now lives in countries with high or very high restrictions on religious freedom.⁷⁵ Christians, as noted earlier, are the number one group against whom these hostilities are aimed. More study and more action is needed on behalf of the global body of Christ which suffers daily. More study is needed to define precisely what constitutes Christian persecution. As this article has demonstrated, Christians are promised blessings only when their persecution happens as a result of Christ and his righteousness. But what precisely does this mean in hostile contexts? The apostle Peter wrestled with this question in his own day (1 Pet 4:14ff.). And Peter concluded that the activity for which Christians suffer must not be evil, must not be criminal. Peter offered no blessing for Christians who proved to be "troublesome meddlers." But surely a great deal more attention is needed on this subject today, as laws are often passed which make either Christian belief or Christian "proselytizing" a criminal activity. Is it persecution, for instance, when a Christian is assaulted after

stating the belief that homosexuality is immoral?

Harry Hammond preached regularly in the town square in Bournemouth. On the occasion of his arrest, he simply held a sign which stated his belief that homosexuality is a sin and called the readers of the sign to turn to Jesus. A group of thirty-forty young people surrounded and assaulted Hammond, even though the record shows that Hammond was temperate in his language. None of the crowd was arrested. Hammond was arrested, convicted, and fined under the Public Order Act of 1986. His case was appealed, although he died before it was decided. In the case of Harry Hammond, the High Court in London upheld Hammond's conviction (posthumously), ruling that he ultimately incited the violence against himself and, therefore, was guilty of a crime against the public order. Was Hammond blessed, guilty of a crime, or both? Was Hammond a troublesome meddler or a faithful disciple? Countless questions such as this can be answered better with more study on the precise nature of Christian persecution.

One can imagine the immense array of instruction needed with regard to persecution by simply considering the work of preachers, pastors, and evangelists. More and more, pastors need to provide counsel to people working in places where rules forbid them from praying, reading Scripture, or voicing concerns on moral issues of significance. Evangelists all around the world are easy targets for those who feel threatened by their proclaiming Jesus's original sermon, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Pastors uphold the righteousness of Christ through the preaching of His word and, thus, are early targets of the ire of unbelievers. In short, persecution is present and on the increase. And the Church needs help from scholars and leaders about what this means and how to respond.

My own prayer, and the spirit in which this essay is submitted, is that God might raise up a new generation of scholars like Augustine and Calvin, men who see their academic role as a service to the church and, in service to the church, that such scholars might focus a great deal more attention on serving the suffering bride of Christ.

¹ David Claydon, "The Persecuted Church" (paper presented at the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization, October 2004). Online: http://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP32_IG3.pdf; accessed January 14, 2014.

² *Ibid.*, sec. 1.1.

³ Tertullian, *Apology*, 40.2. Online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/tertullian01.html>; accessed December 10, 2013.

⁴ Augustine, *City of God* (NPNE, vol. 2; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997 reprint), 61.

⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (John T. McNeill, ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press,

1960), 28-29.

⁶ Acts 14:22, NASB. Scott Cunningham takes this verse as the title for his exploration of the persecution theme in Luke-Acts. Scott Cunningham, *Through Many Tribulations: The Theology of Persecution in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup; Sheffield Academic, 1997).

⁷ 2 Timothy 3:12, NASB.

⁸ See, for example, *Rising Restrictions on Religion*, published by The Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life, August 2011. This report documents 130 countries in which Christians are officially targeted for harassment or other forms of persecution. This was the highest number of countries for any religion.

⁹ Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount: A History of Interpretation and Bibliography* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press and American Theological Library Association, 1975), 242-75, with an extensive bibliography on the Beatitudes, including numerous titles referring to the number of Beatitudes. The trend, according to Kissinger, tends toward nine Beatitudes rather than eight. So, more recent commentaries such as Grant Osborne, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), view Matthew 5:11 as a ninth beatitude.

¹⁰ James Hamilton, Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 380. Hamilton is quoted favorably here in the sense that he establishes the necessity of the kingdom including the salvific work of its king, Jesus, the Messiah.

¹¹ Osborne, *Matthew*, 170.

¹² The perfect passive participle *dediōgmenoi* in v. 10 (who have been persecuted) may well be an indication that at the time of Matthew's writing this persecution was already a reality for some in the community of faith. Of course, the gospel makes plain that Jesus's own followers were accused of lawbreaking (9:14); were rejected (10:14); and were persecuted (10:16-25).

¹³ Warren Carter, "Matthean Christology in Roman Imperial Key: Matthew 1:1," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (eds., John Riches and David Sim; JSNTSup 276; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 143-165, argues from Matthew 1:1 that Christ is pictured from the beginning as king.

¹⁴ Matthew uses the improper preposition in 7 verses: Matt 5:10, 5:11, 10:18, 10:39, 16:25, 19:5, 19:29.

¹⁵ Matthew 8:10, 13; 9:2, 22, 28-29; 15:28; 17:20; 21:21-22, 32.

¹⁶ Roland Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah: Law and Righteousness in the Gospel of Matthew—An Ongoing Debate," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (eds., Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 74.

¹⁷ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 127-45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁹ Benno Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

²¹ Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 245-63, offers an introductory commentary on each of the occurrences of the noun *dikaiousunē* in Matthew.

²² Including Matt 13:17, 13:43, 49; 23:29; 25:37, 46, in which cases those saints displaying righteousness such as that spoken of in 5:10-11 are clearly in view.

²³ Horst Seebass, *Dikaiousunē*, in *NIDNIT* (ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:360.

²⁴ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 94-96.

²⁷ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 53-84, argues for an *inclusio* utilizing John the Baptist and righteousness in 3:15 and 21:32.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ Hamm, *The Beatitudes in Context*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40, emphasis original.

³¹ Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 107.

³³ Roland Deines, *Die Gerechtigkeit der Tora im Reich des Messias: Mt 5,13–20 als Schlüsseltext der mathäischen Theologie* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 177; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). Deines also publishes in English as referenced above.

³⁴ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 250.

³⁷ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 80-81.

³⁸ Davies and Allison, *Commentary on Matthew*, 453.

³⁹ Donald Hagner, "Holiness and Ecclesiology: The Church in Matthew," in *Built Upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (eds. Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 175.

⁴⁰ Deines, "Not the Law but the Messiah," 74, emphasis original.

⁴¹ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL:

InterVarsity Press, 2001), 73.

⁴² Ibid., 45.

⁴³ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Warren Carter, "Matthean Christology in Roman Imperial Key: Matthew 1:1," in *The Gospel of Matthew in its Roman Imperial Context* (eds., John Riches and David Sim; JSNTSup 276; London: T & T Clark, 2005), 143-65.

⁴⁶ Mark Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (New Studies in Biblical Theology; Downers Grove, IL: Apollon Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 177.

⁴⁷ Deines, *Not the Law but the Messiah*, 83, utilizes this description of Christ's followers.

⁴⁸ Gundry, *Matthew*, 73.

⁴⁹ James Montgomery Boice, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 58.

⁵⁰ Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 242.

⁵¹ G. R. Beasley-Murray, "Matthew 6:33: The Kingdom of God and the Ethics of Jesus," in *Neues Testament und Ethik* (ed., Rudolf Schnackenburg; Freiburger: Herder, 1989), 96.

⁵² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 161, notes the first (prōton) in view here is first in importance, not time.

⁵³ Matthew 6:33 has textual variants which omit reference to God and potentially alter the use of the pronoun. Clearly, the kingdom and the righteousness still refer to God, whether the gospel originally stated it pronominally or not.

⁵⁴ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 136.

⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray, "Matthew 6:33," 96.

⁵⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 167.

⁵⁷ Scaer, *Discourses in Matthew*, 252.

⁵⁸ J. S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 121. This citation is no endorsement of Deuteronomistic claims or conclusions.

⁵⁹ This quote is taken from Jervis, "Suffering for the Reign of God," 315. Jervis is presenting the position of Arland Jacobson, "The Literary Unity of Q," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101(1982): 388. This citation is not made in approval of Jervis, Jacobson, or Q scholars' conclusions. It is presented merely as an indication of how others read this significant text relating to Christian persecution.

⁶⁰ Jervis, "Suffering for the Reign of God," 318.

⁶¹ Davies and Allison, *Commentary on Matthew*, 460, argue that Jesus is pictured in Matthew as the true prophet. One could add countless references to Christ as prophet, priest, and king. The point here is that Matthew does not prove Christ primarily as prophet. Persecution is related to Christ, not Christ as prophet.

⁶² Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship Between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), 151.

⁶³ There is no certain Old Testament reference to this prophecy, although some have suggested a reference to the Hebrew nezer, thus indicating a reference to Isa 11:1.

⁶⁴ Jervis is speaking more broadly of all the Qlogia, not simply that about which we are speaking here in Matthew. See Jervis, "Suffering for the Reign of God," 329.

⁶⁵ A recent database survey at a prominent, evangelical seminary library yielded 4,466 entries with the term psychology in the title, while only yielding 118 titles using the term persecution. *Socialism, Bultmann*, and Q were each found in more title entries than persecution (162, 120, and 193 respectively).

⁶⁶ See the companion article in this Journal issue for an overview of persecution around the world.

⁶⁷ John L. Allen, *The Global War on Christians: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Anti-Christian Persecution* (New York: Image, 2013), 1.

⁶⁸ G.W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁶⁹ A. J. Droge and J. D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

⁷⁰ Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001).

⁷¹ Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁷² Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperOne, 2013).

⁷³ Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Wheaton: The Romanian Missionary Society, 1997; reprint, 2000).

⁷⁴ Gregory C. Cochran, "New Testament Persecution and the Inception of Diokology through the Application of the Regnal Righteousness Dynamic," Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010, 195-213 offer a full critique of Ton's work.

⁷⁵ The Pew Center, Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project, "Religious Hostilities Reach Six-Year High," January 2014.