

Psalm 10

In Psalm 10 we read once again of the terrible persecution of God's people and God's church by the proud, deceitful, lying, vain, and fraudulent man. And Psalm 10 reminds us as members of the church of Jesus Christ that God's church always endures tremendous persecution in the midst of this world. That is the way the psalm begins. After a cry to God—"Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?"—the psalm begins to speak of the persecution of the poor. "The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor" (v. 2). And the entire psalm enumerates, or lists, the ways that God's people suffer persecution at the hands of the wicked.

That persecution is terrible indeed. It is very grievous to be borne. It is so grievous to be borne because the people of God have no strength in themselves. They have no way in their own power to fight back against the wicked. In this psalm we read of the righteous as the humble (v. 17). We read of them as the fatherless and the oppressed (v. 18). All those words are meant to show the weakness and the helplessness of the people of God. We even read about the effect of this persecution upon the hearts of God's people in verse 17: "Thou wilt prepare *their heart*." That refers to what is going on in the thoughts and hearts of God's people as they suffer the persecution of the wicked: their hearts are in turmoil or at least are threatened to be in turmoil. There are all kinds of thoughts that run through their minds, all kinds of doubts and fears that they have to endure as they suffer the tremendous persecution of the wicked.

What does that persecution look like? That persecution comes from specific men. They are the wicked, who are proud (v. 2). They are lifted up; they imagine that they have strength; they make many devices by which they may ensnare and entrap the people of God. "The wicked boasteth of his heart's desire" (v. 3), which means that the persecution of the church arises out of the will and the heart of man. Man says about his desire in his heart, "*My will* must stand. My will must be exalted above all. And all who stand opposed to my will must be subjugated under me." Rather than exalt the will of God, rather than champion the revelation of Jehovah, these proud men champion their own wills and do all their hearts' desire and boast of it.

These men, when they sit in judgment, bless the covetous, though the Lord abhorreth the covetous (v. 3). These men, who are called upon to judge the cause of God's people, who have the humble and the fatherless and the oppressed come before them in their church courts—that is, in their consistories and classes and synods—instead of protecting the oppressed, bless the covetous, though the Lord abhorreth them. And these wicked, through the pride of their countenances, will not seek after God. God is not in all their thoughts (v. 4). Man is in their thoughts. Their own wills and their own honor are in their thoughts. That makes all the ways of these proud, wicked men grievous (v. 5). These men do not do good to the people of God but rather evil, so that whenever God's people come into contact with them, their ways are grievous. The people of God endure pain and suffering at their hands. God's judgments are not at all in these men's minds (v. 5). And they turn to all their enemies and disdain them. They puff at their enemies (v. 5), which is another reference to the pride of their hearts. They imagine that they are safe. They imagine that no one can do them harm. "He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity" (v. 6).

Oftentimes the cruelty of these wicked men is expressed in the words that they speak. "His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity" (v. 7), so that even if these men never lay their physical hands upon the people of God to smite them and to leave bruises upon their flesh, nevertheless, the words that the wicked speak are great swelling words that hurt and are meant to destroy the people of God. The mouth of the wicked does not know the truth of God but is full only of cursing and deceit, or lying, and fraud, that is, taking what is not his for his own. Under his tongue is mischief and vanity.

These proud wicked who persecute God's people lurk in the villages (v. 8), which indicates that this persecution is being inflicted by one's countrymen, who live in the village with him—which means that this persecution is inflicted by the church. It is the false church, which calls itself the church of Jesus Christ, that begins and sustains the persecution against God's people. It is the member of the false church who pretends that he is a villager with you in the city of God. He lurks there. And in the secret places he murders the innocent, and his eyes are always set against the poor (v. 8)—another description of the helplessness of God's people. "He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net" (v. 9). Men might wait for a long time as they crouch and lurk, waiting for the right opportunity to spring upon God's people and destroy them at a time when the poor and the fatherless and the oppressed are especially helpless, especially vulnerable, at a time when the wicked have the majority in the consistories and the classis delegations of the church. At that time the poor are particularly helpless, and then the wicked spring as a lion.

"He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: he hideth his face; he will never see it" (v. 11). These men forget that there is a judge in heaven who sees all these things and loves his people. So the wicked continue to prepare their strong ones (v. 10), meaning their claws and their teeth, those strong parts that devour the people of God in order to consume the church of Jesus Christ.

And now the question for the church is, how can the poor and the helpless and the fatherless endure such persecution of the wicked?

First, we endure this persecution through the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ because the description of these proud, wicked ones in Psalm 10 is a description that characterizes every one of us by nature. There is plenty of deceit and mischief and vanity in our hearts by nature. We by nature are proud and lifted up against our brethren. By nature we seek the destruction of all who stand in the way of our hearts' desire. By nature we are no different than the wicked, proud persecutors of the church. God gave an example of that to the church in the apostle Paul. Paul stands as an example of what all of us are by nature. Paul, before his conversion, was the most aggressive, violent persecutor of the church. But God redeemed Paul through the blood of Jesus Christ. And that is our hope as well: that, as we suffer this persecution and recognize our own wretchedness and iniquity, God has forgiven our sins in the blood of Christ. He has united us to Christ and made his cause our cause, so that now, by his grace, our cause is not the destruction of the church but the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is how the poor and the helpless and the fatherless endure this persecution.

Second, we endure this persecution as we remember that all of this persecution is aimed at Jesus Christ. He is the one in this psalm who is being persecuted. He is the poor and the helpless and the oppressed. He is the one who cries out at the beginning of the psalm, "Why standest thou afar off, O LORD? why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble?" You hear in that first verse an echo of his cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The Lord Jesus Christ is the one who is persecuted. The scriptures teach that in many places. For example, the apostle Paul, as he wrote to the church in Colosse, said that his sufferings were filling up the measure of the sufferings of Christ (Col. 1:24). That is, as members of the body of Christ, we suffer his persecution with him. Or remember the words of our Lord in Matthew 10, "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matt. 10:25). The wicked persecute Jesus Christ. That is their aim. They hate Christ. All their persecution is directed at him—which means that all of the persecution that the body of Christ faces from these wicked men has already been faced and, in essence, in principle, completed by our Lord Jesus Christ. That persecution cannot destroy you because it did not destroy the head! The Lord Jesus Christ was not overcome by it, but he had the victory over it. And he reminded his disciples of that right before he went to the cross. "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). All of the persecution that the church endures cannot be for your destruction, though it might look to the eye of flesh like it is. It can only be for the good of the church, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

We have seen that in our own life as a church as well. There has been tremendous and severe persecution. There has been lying in wait to slay the members of this church when we were members in the Protestant Reformed Churches and when we were members in the Reformed Protestant Churches. There was tremendous deceit and fraud perpetrated against God's people by those who have shown themselves to be enemies of the cause of Jesus Christ. And yet God has used that persecution for the good of his people. He has used it to teach us, so that we see the truth in greater clarity; and he has used that persecution to form, out of the wreckage that those churches left, Remnant Reformed Church. That is the good gift and the good work of our God for which he has used this persecution.

And then, finally, the church endures this persecution secure in the knowledge that God sees what man thinks God does not see. God sees the violence. He sees the fraud. He sees the emptiness and the deceit that all the persecutors are filled with. He knows the oppression of his people. He knows that oppression better than we ourselves know it because Jehovah understands fully and infinitely all the significance of that oppression in ways that we often do not. And Jehovah God, who sees and knows that oppression, will judge the wicked. The psalmist prays, "Break thou the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till thou find none" (v. 15). That means that God visits the wickedness of the wicked until they are utterly consumed and until there is no more wickedness to find and to punish. And for all of those who are the enemies of God, who are not his people, that judgment of God is infinite. "The LORD is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land" (v. 16).

And God, in judging the wicked and the oppressors, saves the humble, the helpless, the poor, and the oppressed. "LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear" (v. 17). In all of the fear that the child of God is tempted to have, Jehovah God prepares our hearts by teaching us, "I hear you. I hear your cry. I hear the words of the psalmist, my Son Jesus Christ." God comes "to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that the man of the earth may no more oppress" (v. 18). This is great comfort for the child of God in the midst of his persecution. There is a God who judges.

The church, for all her life, endures persecution. Her life in the world is one of taking up her cross, denying herself, and following the Lord Jesus Christ. But her life in the midst of that persecution can be one of joy and gladness and comfort, for Jehovah God has his ears open to her cry.