

Count the Cost: Rejected For Christ, and the Bible

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This is a bit more complicated than one might first suspect. While being rejected for Christ does end in eternal rewards, there are tightly defined qualifications for eligibility to such trophies. I want to begin by retracing my steps on this issue.

“Count the Cost”

I began seeking God ... battered and bleeding. The wounds were internal - but real - and life was exiting through them. I decided to read the Bible for myself and was soon intrigued by some statements ... but confronted by others. For example, when speaking to potential followers, Jesus used this illustration: *“Which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and **count the cost**? ... Otherwise, when ... not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule ...”* (Lk 14:28-30). Elsewhere He said, *“A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher”* (Lk 6:40). I soon realized that part of *“the cost”* was, *“you will be hated by all nations on account of My Name”* (Mt 24:9) ... and there was no guarantee my fate would be better than His. Indeed, I should expect His. Boy, ... what an encouragement.

God’s Enemies and God’s Enemy

The call? *“Come to Me”* (Mt 11:28) ... and be ready to pick up God’s enemies. That last part was not too ... exciting. I already had plenty of enemies. And if I cooperated with Him, I would still be an American white male, and part of a *“Christian country”* espousing capitalism. So, let’s see, ... that’s already a few billion enemies - give or take a few million. *“Jealousy is as cruel as the grave”* (SS 8:6). But, as I continued reading, I discovered ... *God Himself* was my *“natural”* enemy! In fact, *He topped the list* with no intention of being supplanted by some underling. So, *“the choice”* became - retain God as enemy Number 1 ... or cooperate with Him - and pick up His enemies. *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into Hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!”* (Lk 12:4,5).

After submitting to sane reality, it seemed reasonable to investigate this rejection matter more fully. The bedrock is probably in the Sermon on the Mount. *“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you **falsely on account of Me**. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great”* (Mt 5:11,12). This is a conditional promise.

Condition 1: “Falsely”

The insinuation is that one can be insulted and persecuted ... truly. Unfortunately, that may constitute the bulk of the human resistance I have incurred over the years. *“By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler (lit. ‘one who oversees others’ affairs)”* (1Pet 4:15). *“For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?”* (1Pet 2:20). This rhetorical question is an emphatic literary device in Koine Greek. The answer is, *“None.”* No credit gained or given.

Condition 2: “On Account of Me”

... not, *“on account of me”* - little *“m.”* But troubles *“on account of Me”* (big”M”) will be recompensed beyond any mortal’s ability to now comprehend. One prerequisite though, is one *must be known* ... as a follower of Christ. That requires some degree of previous verbalization. A sole

commitment to *“lifestyle evangelism”* will not suffice. While our behaviors are to be consistent with His Word, they are not meant to replace it. How can outsiders know what they are seeing - if they do not know the injunctions behind the behaviors? *“For whoever is ashamed of Me **and My words** in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with His holy angels”* (Mk 8:38).

In new relationships, I want my Christianity known as early as possible for several reasons. First, if left hidden, acquaintances have said, or done things, that later embarrassed them - after learning I was a Christian. This has damaged relationships - not in me ... but in them. Second, by making my Christianity known early, the platform is set for the relationship to proceed on terms I prefer - whether it becomes *“hot”* or *“cold”* (Rev 3:16). Third, if a relationship does degenerate - there's a better chance it will be worthwhile. *“If you do what is right, and suffer for it ... this finds favor with God ... If you should suffer for the sake of righteousness - blessed”* (1Pet 2:20 and 3:14).

“Rejoice and Be Glad ...”

This too is somewhat ... complicated. When thinking soberly, I want people to say, *“Yes”* to God. Paul told King Agrippa (after having his sanity challenged), *“I would pray to God ... all who hear me ... might become such as I am, except for these chains”* (Ac 26:29). And even though Paul had told some gospel-rejecting Jews, *“you ... judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life”* (Ac 13:46), he still experienced *“great sorrow and unceasing grief”* in his heart and could pray himself *“accursed”* if that could result in his countrymen's salvation (Ro 9:1-5). He wanted everyone to say, *“Yes”* to God. Jesus once looked upon *“a great multitude and felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd”* (Mk 6:34). He took the job - but to be rejected as the Shepherd does not bring joy. He takes *“no pleasure in the death of the wicked”* (Ezk 18:23 and 32). So, ... upon what grounds can one *“rejoice, and be glad”* when rejected on account of Christ?

First, a negative reaction ... is better than *no* reaction. One time, a fellow at a Gospel Mission I staffed became quite hostile. In the heated exchange, I said, *“I have more hope for you than most people coming through here - **at least you are reacting!**”* The conflict ended because - he didn't know what to say. We know *“God did not send the Son into the world to damn the world (it's already damned) but that the world should be saved through Him”* (Jn 3:17). I do not believe any spiritual exchange I have with anyone is *“an accident”* ... even you - right now. I trust God to bring each person *“in”* - sometime before his/her last breath. I do not care when, where, ... or how. Has God brought me into one's realm ... for additional judgment? His *“mercy triumphs over judgment”* (Ja 2:13). He stages these *“visits”* ... and I am glad - at least in the long run.

Second, from a self-centered view, such opposition *“is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation”* ... for me (Ph 1:28). Persecution, on account of Him, is an evidence of salvation. *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God”* (Ro 8:16). Such understood interventions by God immediately creates rejoicing ... even if one is in prison, beaten, and in chains (Ac 16:25). By the way, it says *“a **sign** of destruction”* not *“**assigned** to destruction.”* I guess it all comes down to one word: *hope*. I *hope* in our Redeemer ... as Redeemer. And if He can redeem me, He can redeem anybody. He is plundering Satan's house (Mk 3:27).

First Strike

There is another way to approach this. The world may reject me on account of Christ, but I ... *rejected it first*. And it should be upset with me. After all, *I am a betrayer*. I once willingly reclined in this world, and partook of its offerings. But now, I have turned against it. I attack its false hopes, its empty promises, and declare it incapable of delivering substantive purpose. Should I expect no

retaliation? So, in reality, the world *is reacting* to me ... as I made the first strike. The chorus to my song, "The World" (Oct, 1981), says:

*"World, don't bother rejecting me - 'cause I've already rejected you.
As God opens my eyes - exposin' each of your lies,
I keep findin' - myself sayin' - to you, 'World, we're through!'"*

Conclusion

Because we seek to benefit people by our work and witness, rejection is often startling, hard to understand - and hard to rejoice about. Sometimes the rejection is clearly "*on account of Me*" (Mt 5:11) ... but not always. An accurate assessment may not come until the Judgment. A key factor is the troublemaker's *true motives*. It will be interesting to see if attacks from carnal Christians ... end in eternal rewards. If so, many of the Christian ministries I have been in will prove "*gold mines*." So, the bottom-line? "*If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God*" (1Pet 4:15-16). God, ... help us qualify.

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