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If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, or aren't sure and would like to become one, then you need to believe that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God, that he was God who became a man, that he lived a sinless and perfect life, keeping the Law of God perfect in every way, that he kept faith perfectly, and that he was crucified on that cruel cross for your sins, mine and the entire world - he died for our sins! His death on the cross paid the penalty fully, one time for all sins that we have ever committed and that we will ever commit. He died; he went down into the bowels of the earth, even into Hell, and was raised from the dead on the third day in a resurrected, eternal body. He ascended back into heaven, was seated at the right hand of God, and is now Lord over heaven and earth. He is coming again to judge the world, to raise the dead, where he will give an eternal, resurrected, glorified body to everyone that has believed on him as their Lord and Savior, and to establish his kingdom on earth.

You come become a Christian right now as you read this by personally placing your faith and trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior; believing that he is God's only begotten Son, that he died on the cross for you and that he was raised from the dead and is now seated in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. *"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.."* [Acts 16:31a](#) And when you do trust Christ, and Christ alone, as your Lord and Savior, then go to God the Father in heaven in prayer and tell him so. Tell him that you have believed on his Son, thank him for his Son, and thank him for forgiving your sins and saving you! *"That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord", and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."* [Romans 10:9,10](#) *"For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* [Romans 10:13](#) *"Therefore, being justified by faith (declared righteous), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* [Romans 5:1](#)

January 2010

Power In A Clay Pot

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” 2 Corinthians 4:7

G. Clay Pots. v. 7

1. *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels”* - εχομεν δε τον θησαυρον τουτον εν οστρακινοις σκευεσιν

As the clay pot is made from the soil, so is man. And Paul uses the metaphor of clay pots to denote the physical frailty of our human natures and the valuable spiritual contents that are inside every believer in Jesus Christ. He also goes into the tremendous pressure that is continually put on believers in Christ, especially those believers who are living the faith rest life and are serving the Lord in some spiritual capacity, pressure from the world system, the flesh nature (theirs and others) and the devil.

When someone came into a shop in those days and purchased something, and was going to leave and come back at a later time to pick it up, the contents of it would be placed in a clay pot, the lid would be placed on it and sealed with hot wax, then the new owner would press his signet ring on the hot wax to identify the pot and its contents as belonging to him. When he completed his journey and time came to retrieve the items belonging to him, he would either come back to the shop in person, or he would send his servants to get the pot.

Now if someone came in the shop later on and asked what was in the pot the owner would politely tell him that it was none of his business, which it wasn't. And when you looked at this poor clay pot sitting up there on the shelf you would never know what was inside. It might be trinkets, it might be perfume, or herbs, or jewelry, food, or something very valuable.

The important thing was not the clay pot, but what the pot contained! Paul said, but we have, *echomen*, the present active indicative of *echo*, this treasure in earthen vessels. *Echo* meant to have and to hold, to possess something. Which tells us that this treasure that believers have inside is theirs! God created it in us as his gift to us and it is ours for all eternity!

The word for treasure is *thesauros* and it referred to anything of value one would store in some place safe, such as a treasure box, a chest, a storehouse, even in a temple treasury. Today it would be similar to a safety deposit box in a bank's vault. When something was of extreme value, it obviously would not be stored in a simple clay pot, but in a place that offered the most protection, as in a temple treasury.

Vessels served a purpose, some were used for transporting, others, for lighting, others for serving, others for eating from and others for decoration. Here the vessel, which is our body, is not used for the purpose of protecting that which is inside, but temporarily storing it! The treasure it houses is the new man, (our human spirit), and the indwelling Holy Spirit. The eternal is hid inside the mortal and is set free upon the advent of our physical death. Other passages of Scripture refer to the body as a tent, with the soul as being the tent pole. When the traveler was ready to move on, he stepped outside the tent and pulled on a cord, (the silver cord?), which was attached to the tent pole and the tent collapsed.

2. “*That the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*” - ινα η υπερβολη της δυναμεως η του θεου και μη εξ ημων.

We find *hina* plus the subjunctive mood used here to introduce a purpose clause. We have this eternal treasure in our bodies of clay for a purpose, and the purpose is that the surpassing power of God is not from ourselves but from God. God is constantly reminding us of his grace versus our works. We try to live life in our own strength and we are constantly brought up against situations where we absolutely cannot handle, nor do we have the answers for them. Our works fail us. But when we come to God in faith and prayer looking to him for strength we prevail!

Paul finally understood this in 2 Corinthians 12:10 when he said, “*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*” His clay pot, neither in the physical side of it, nor the mental side of it, was able to handle the pressures and problems of this life.

His *infirmities*, ασθενειας, looked at the weakness of his flesh, all aspects of it; the *reproaches*, υβρεσιν, looked at the injurious insults that he was subjected to; the *necessities*, αναγκαις, looked at the things he had to go through that he absolutely could not handle, sort of like the irresistible force meeting the immovable object; *persecutions*, διωγμοις, was the hostile treatment that he was constantly subjected to; and the *distresses*, στενοχωριας, was where he was put into those “no way out” situations.

So what was the effect and the result that all that had on the Apostle Paul? The first effect was that he ended up in depression and despair because he tried to handle the pressure on his clay pot in his own strength and works! “*For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we **despaired** even of life:*” 2Corinthians 1:8

But when he spiritually recovered and got his eyes of faith back on the Lord again, we see that he stopped relying upon himself and his own abilities and started trusting the Lord again. “*But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that **we should not trust in ourselves, but in God** which raiseth the dead:*” 2 Corinthians 1:9

And we see this faith confidence in the Lord's abilities now reflected in his second letter. Now, instead of asking God to take the problems away from him, (his clay pot), he's delighting in the problems because it is then that he sees the power of God operating in his life!

It takes power to live life, and it takes power to go through all the difficult things in life that we have to go through. “*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that **we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.***” Acts 14:22 But where does this power come from? From ourselves? Or from God? The ablative of source, *tu theou*, tells us that the ultimate source comes from God the Father and the immediate source comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit, του θεου και μη εξ ημων. And *ek* used with the negative *me*, combined with *us*, tells us that this power **definitely does not originate in us**.

By having this treasure of the new life placed inside these bodies of weak and corrupting flesh forces us to live in the spiritual life dynamic of faith in the Word, trust in the Father and the filling of the Holy Spirit. If we don't, then the pressure of the world, flesh and the devil will crush us. But when we do, then we are victorious over all these things and retain our peace and joy.

H. Pressure On The Clay Pot. v.8

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;”
2 Corinthians 4:8

εν παντι θλιβομενοι	αλλ ου στενοχωρουμενοι
απορουμενοι	αλλ ουκ εξαπορουμενοι
διωκομενοι	αλλ ουκ εγκαταλειπομενοι
καταβαλλομενοι	αλλ ουκ απολλυμενοι

1. *“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed”* - εν παντι θλιβομενοι αλλ ου στενοχωρουμενοι.

In grammar this is called a **mesodiplosis**, which is a repeating of words in the middle of successive sentences. It is a device used in poetry to add to the drama of what is being said, as well as to enable the individual to remember it.

Paul begins with *en panti, in all things, or in everything*, the thought of *en panti* is to be carried throughout the entire concept. **Which is to say that every where they go, and in every situation they find themselves, they find themselves under pressure, perplexed, persecuted and cast down.**

But when we find the use of something used in poetry, we have Paul's life becoming a poem, not the poem of Greek tragedy, but the poem of the Greek drama. As Peter brings out in 2 Peter 1, our lives on earth are being acted out like on the Greek stage and we are the heroes of our own play. And we see poetry going on in Paul's life.

The poetry is that Paul's little clay pot was being subjected to all sorts of pressure, perplexity, persecution and even being cast down, but he was victorious over it all. In every place and in every situation Paul was subjected to these things, **but he was able to arise victoriously above them all by living in the spiritual life dynamic!** So **Paul's life was one of a triumphant poem!** He could truly say, *“I am strong for all things through Christ who strengthens me”!*

Thlibomenoi, θλιβομενοι, is the present passive participle of *thlibo*. The noun form is *thlipsis*, which is translated as *tribulation*. It means to press, to squash, to rub in, to press together, to oppress, to trouble, tribulation, or affliction. Basically it is any form of pressure which burdens the spirit. It is found externally from the world system, other people, nature and Satan's rule over this planet. Internally it comes from our own flesh natures, both the sin nature and the biological nature, and from dealing with garbage in the soul.

The modern day term is stress, but actually stress is the agitation or feeling of discomfort in the soul, while pressure would be the external. Pressure is inevitable; it comes with this life. But stress, the inner turmoil is optional and **stress is only present in the soul when we do not meet the pressures of life with faith in the Word of God in the filling of the Holy Spirit.**

Christ told us that in this world **we will have pressure** (tribulation), but to be encouraged because he has overcome the world. *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have **tribulation**: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33 He also told us not to be **stressed** (troubled). *“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be **troubled**, neither let it be afraid.”* John 14:27

But we keep on possessing this treasure in the sphere of these earthen vessels in order that the surpassing greatness of the power may be from the source of God and not from ourselves. We are constantly under pressure, constantly perplexed as to what to do next, constantly persecuted and constantly being cast down. **We cannot handle this in our own strength!** But when we turn to God in faith we receive his strength and we are victorious.

The present participle of *thlibo* tells us that this was a way of life for the Apostle Paul and the others, and it is also a way of life for all believers in Christ. If you have ever wondered why there is so much pressure in the Christian life. The passive voice tells us that they received the action of constantly being under pressure. Now sometimes we bring pressure and problems on ourselves because of our own rebellion, disobedience and bad decisions, but even aside from that there is still pressure.

The sources of pressure are endless; our health, getting older, the job, the family, society, neighbors, responsibility, the nation, our testimony for Christ, the flesh nature, scar tissue problems in the soul, governments, Satan and his demons, our determination to stick with the Word of God and his will for our lives. All of these are actual pressures and have the potential for stress, if we do not handle them by faith in the grace and power of God.

But pressure has been determined for us; it is inescapable. But pressure does not have to turn into stress in the soul, neither do we have to have fear as the result. It is a part of the package of suffering for the sake of Christ. *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;”* Philippians 1:29 It is a part of God's dealing with us in his grace and through his grace found in the spiritual life we can rise above it in peace.

Being subjected to pressure, which is a part of suffering, is filling up the afflictions of Christ in our own bodies. *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:”* Colossians 1:24

Christ himself told us that **we will have pressure** because we are living in this world controlled by the devil and his demons. *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, (thlipsis - pressure): but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”* John 16:33

Pressure has been designed by God for us to grow in grace in conformity to the image of Christ. It causes us to turn to God in prayer and the Word of God in faith, the result of which strengthens our faith, causes us to grow in faith and Bible Doctrine, it renews the new man inside of us, and produces for us eternal benefits and rewards. *“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

But this passage is not just set in poetic form, but it actually was a hymn that was sang in the early Church. It was a hymn of the tribulation that believers go through on earth, but more than that, **it was a hymn of victory over all the things in life we go through!** Remember, that in the early church most believers could neither read nor write, and even if they could, there was a scarcity of writing materials to pen things down. So one of the most efficient ways to retain key doctrines was to put them in the forms of hymns or chants that could easily be remembered by singing a melody with the words.

2. "Yet not distressed" - ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωροῦμενοι

Stenochoria meant to be crowded into a narrow place, to be confined, to be pressed for room, to be in a situation where there is no way out, to be trapped, to feel trapped. And found in the present passive participle it shows that this not only was a way of life for them, but also it came about as outside forces, (and inside as well), were acting upon their souls.

But whenever stenochoria is found in the latter, with the word thlipsis, (the word for pressure), then stenochoria becomes the stronger of the two. It intensifies the idea contained in the contextual meaning regarding pressure showing it to be the normal end result of pressure on the soul, (distress), and speaks of the idea of **the crushing of the soul!**

Believers in Jesus Christ routinely talk about the pressures that they are going through in their lives. Pressures from the job, the family, finances, their health, business, etc., are all common topics of conversation. Many believers don't understand why. They reason that if they have believed on Jesus Christ, or if they're doing God's will for their lives; if they are under the teaching of Bible Doctrine, or if they're a child of God, then **why are they going through so much pressure in their lives?**

But we need to remember that the Lord told us that in this world there is much pressure, but he has overcome the world. And that we will have to go through **many pressures** in this life before we enter into God's celestial kingdom. "*Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through **much tribulation** enter into the kingdom of God.*" Acts 14:22

Paul said that they were always under pressure as a way of life, but not crushed by the pressure! So the question is why? What is there that believers in Christ have going for them that unbelievers don't? Many people on earth have gone through the death of a close loved one, or through a divorce, loss of a child, financial reversal and many other things in life and have been crushed by it! While the believer in Christ, who is walking in through the spiritual life dynamic, goes through the same things and is not crushed by them! They suffer, this is true, but it doesn't crush them.

The reason why is when we believed on Jesus Christ as our Savior, we were indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who created a new nature in us. It is this new nature, combined with the filling of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and as we operate by the faith rest dynamic of simply believing the promises and doctrines of God's Word, that **we are inwardly strengthened so that we can go through the pressure and suffering of the trial without having it crush us!**

To be sure we suffer, we do feel the pain that we are going through, but it does not crush our spirits. And the reason why is that the operation of the spiritual life dynamic inside us offsets the pressure! It keeps us from being crushed. It is through the operation of the believer exercising faith in the Word of God, in the Father, in his promises, in his doctrines that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit.

The matter of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, and living in the spiritual life dynamic by faith in his Word after salvation is vitally important, for it is through the operation of faith that we have victory over the world system and the devil himself. "*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcome the world, even our faith.*" 1 John 5:4 Our souls are constantly under pressure while we are here in the devil's world in these bodies of flesh. But what keeps us from being crushed by the pressure is living life by means of the new nature, the filling of the Holy Spirit and the metabolizing by faith the doctrines of God's Word! **This becomes our hymn of victory!**

3. “*We are perplexed, but not in despair;*” - απορουμενοι αλλ ουκ εξαπορουμενοι.

The KJV has it as *distressed*, while the NIV has it as *perplexed*. In the original it is the present middle participle of *aporeo*. Perhaps the better English word to define this is uncertain. Not definitely ascertainable or fixed, not clearly or precisely determined, an unforeseeable outcome or effect, to not know the way, to not know what to do next.

The Holy Spirit leads them to some town and so there they are. What do we do next? The Lord brings some person to them, or opens up doors in some area, and there they minister the Word of God. They've got that part down. They are to preach the Gospel and teach Bible Doctrine. But how long they are going to stay there? Where will they reside? How will they feed themselves? How long will they be there? Where are they going to go after they leave there? What things are they going to encounter while they are there, are all the questions of uncertainty.

The present participle shows that this was a way of life for the Apostle Paul and the others as they ministered for the Lord. Today we have much of our lives down to a schedule, we get up in the morning, eat breakfast, go to work, come home, eat dinner, spend time with the family, go to church, etc.. Yet even with us there is so much uncertainty to our lives, especially living in the times we do.

But Paul is speaking for himself and the men with him as they went about preaching the Word. They were constantly facing new problems, new pressures (along with the old), new situations, new threats, new changes, new decisions and new directions to go in their lives. God did not send them a fax of the outline of their lives that he had for them! It was going to unfold day by day as they were led by the Holy Spirit. This was the uncertainty of it all. This is the characteristic of those who live by faith in life. There is uncertainty, but it doesn't get you down because you know that the Father has planned it all and has everything under control.

But the average Christian today has it all under their control (their works), or is trying to get everything under control. Their lives are one big program and they go to program churches where everything is planned out and a program exists for everything. Dynamic, confident Pastors, (general managers of a nonprofit religious corporation), running the operation according to the things democratically planned out by various committees. If you ask them what's going to be going on next week, next month, they will be able to confidently tell you what the church has planned. They try to eliminate uncertainty in their lives by their works of the flesh.

But when you live by faith there is that element of uncertainty. You know that control is an illusion, for we cannot control the things that are going to happen to us in life. The only control we have is how we respond to them, and that is to be by faith in the Father. Even though we try to structure our lives, we know that the outcome is unforeseeable. Even though we try to plan our lives out, there is no way that we can precisely determine things, nor foresee what the future holds! **If we cannot control how tall we can become, how can we eliminate uncertainty in our lives??** “*And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?*” Luke 12:25

If we were allowed to stay in the same comfortable surroundings, we would find, after having adjusted to them, we would be needing to trust the Lord less and less. But when we are taken out of one familiar and comfortable setting and placed into a new situation, we experience uncertainty. But it is there in that uncertainty that God wants us to orient to him in faith. God wants us to learn that our lives will always be changing, but it is He that changes not!

4. “*But not in despair;*” - *αλλ ουκ εξαπορουμενοι.*

The word for *despair* is the present middle participle of *exaporeo* and it meant to be at a total loss as to what to do, to be without resources, to lose hope, to be in despair, to be in a situation that it is so completely beyond your ability to handle it that you give up in despair, utter hopelessness, to lose faith, extreme discouragement, to lose hope and give up on faith.

When people go through a serious of loss and traumatic events, they can feel like their world is spinning out of control, that everything is coming apart. It is the uncertainty and the insecurity of all this that can get to us after awhile. If one does not handle this with faith in the promises of God, then the believer will start to slip into depression and despair and their outlook toward the future will be one of utter hopelessness.

It may start with having your hours cut back at work, only to be followed by being laid off three months down the road. You manage to keep making the house payment for awhile, but now you can't and it falls in arrears just like your car payment, medical insurance and other bills. Obviously your great plans for the future are beginning to disappear like a cloud in the sky. Old friends and acquaintances that you have known for years start to avoid you, (I guess they think it's contagious), some might even turn against you, appliances in the home start to break down with no money to repair or replace them, they're repossessing your car, the bill collectors are knocking at the door, and the bank has notified you that the house is going into foreclosure!

Sound depressing? Don't want to listen to it? Just remember that in the years 2008 and 2009 7.1 million Americans have had their homes foreclosed on and are living this scenario and many of them are believers in Jesus Christ! **Perplexity can lead to despair**, if the individual does not get their faith in the Lord and his Word up and running.

This is what the Apostle Paul is telling us. We may not know what to do next in our lives, but we haven't lost our faith! We may be uncertain about what lies ahead for us, but we haven't lost hope! We may not understand what we've had to go through, but we haven't given up! He's telling us that the spiritual life that God has created in us is **sufficient to carry us through any pressure in life!**

As Paul told us in Philippians 4:13, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” Or, “*I am strong for all things through Christ who strengthens me inwardly.*” The verb “*I can do*” is *ischuo* and it meant to be able to prevail over any situation because you have the strength to do so. Paul talked about four concepts that they faced as they lived the Christian life here in the devil's world: **pressure, perplexity, persecution and being cast down**; concepts that would destroy the unsaved if they went through them. But those things didn't destroy the Apostles' souls, and won't us as well, because they lived in the power of the spiritual life God has placed in all believers in Christ.

Many a mother in America has walked away from her family because she can't handle the **pressure** any more and the same for husbands. Many a wife has divorced her husband because he isn't providing the financial security and stability she wants for the home. She can't handle the **uncertainty** of it all. The pressures and uncertainties of life build up in many people and they end up in mental institutions, or on drugs, both legal and illegal. It is reported that one half of the American people are now on legal drugs. Pressure and uncertainty can have disastrous effects on the souls and lives of people! But God has provided for us an inner spiritual dynamic; it's our power in a clay pot that can withstand anything that life or the devil can throw at us and we can come through it victoriously in peace!

I. Clay Pots Continued. v.9

“Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;” 2 Corinthians 4:9

1. “Persecuted, but not forsaken;” - διωκομενοι αλλ ουκ εγκαταλειπομενοι

Dioko, persecuted, meant to be put to flight, to be driven away, to be pursued, to be expelled and always from an outside source acting upon a person and usually because of a religious element. Found in the present passive participle it shows that this also was a way of life for the Apostles as they went about ministering for the Lord. In the passive voice it shows that they received the action of the verb; they didn't want to be persecuted, (who does?), and they weren't persecuting themselves, but others were doing it to them.

The believers in the early Church in Jerusalem suffered persecution from the hands of the unsaved Jews living there. When they fled to other countries over the years they endured persecution there, sometimes from the hands of the authorities and sometimes from the Jews living there. Sometimes the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists and Pastor-Teachers were persecuted because they preached the Word, and sometimes Christians were persecuted simply because they were Christians!

Persecution against believers takes its form in many ways and in many areas. There is the obvious form of persecution that is **physical**, where believers are beaten, whipped, tortured and have to run for their lives. There is **economic** persecution, where believers don't get hired for jobs, get fired from their jobs, lose out on business contracts, or people won't frequent their businesses because they're Christians. There is **social** persecution where believers and their families are snubbed, ostracized and slandered simply because they're Christians. There is **legal** and **political** persecution where the laws of a country are against them, or those in authority persecute them using the laws and their positions.

When a father can't find work because he's a Christian, or nobody frequents their business to buy things, where there is a campaign in a town or village to run a family out, or when their children are picked on, or beaten up by others, whether they're driven out, or starved out, the family eventually has to pick up stakes and move to another town that is more friendly. That is also persecution.

Paul wrote that all believers who desire to live godly lives shall suffer persecution. “*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*” 2 Timothy 3:12 The idea behind godly lives, or godliness, *eusebeia*, is a believer in Christ living in his/her own spiritual life, which consists of living in the filling of the Holy Spirit, living by faith, metabolizing Bible Doctrine by faith, and then the application of that inner spiritual dynamic to the outside world. When believers do that, then **they will** experience one or more manifestations of persecution as mentioned before.

Paul also showed that legalism persecutes grace. You will find this in legalistic, works oriented religions persecuting Christians and their churches. And you will often find it in churches where legalistic believers will persecute grace believers. “*But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.*” Galatians 4:29 The grace of God sets us free, but there are those who can't stand that. It's not that they aren't free, they could be if they wanted to, it's just that they can't stand other people being free! So they do everything in their power to bring the free person under their tyranny, and when they can't, they do everything they can to make their lives miserable. **Pride, self righteousness and legalism always persecutes grace!**

Persecution is never pleasant, but it is a blessing for the Lord himself is going to reward us for being persecuted in this life. *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”* Matthew 5:10-12

For the most part, American Christians have not suffered the severe persecution that is going on in other parts of the world. But there still is a level of persecution that many do experience. Maligning and slandering by others, being passed over for promotion, not being able to land a business contract, losing your job, not getting hired, people not shopping at your store, ill treatment at the job site. And in addition to that, there is always the persecution that grace believers receive from legalistic believers!

But the time of the greatest persecution that believers in Christ will undergo on earth is from the great tribulation. *“And he said, "And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of **great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* Revelation 7:14

We see a vast number of these souls, who had been slain because of their testimony for Jesus Christ and the Word of God, under the altar of God in heaven crying out to God for vengeance. *“And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not **judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth**? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”* Revelation 6:9-11

It will be during this time that the antichrist, fully indwelt, energized and enraged by Satan himself, will war against the believers in Christ on the earth. *“And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.”* Revelation 13:7 *“I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them;”* Daniel 7:21

It will be the Beast system of Babylon, that we already see at work in America and around the world, that will be persecuting Christians. It will culminate when the marking system of the antichrist is forced upon the people of the world. This will take place when a computer chip is required upon every person without which they will not be able to buy or sell in Babylon's market place.

The Greek word for *mark* is *charagma* and denotes something that has been etched. This is why we say that it will be a computer chip, for the process used in making them is by etching. The skin won't be etched, but something that has been etched will be placed upon the skin. *“And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in (epi – upon) their right hand, or in their foreheads:”* Revelation 13:16

The number of the Beast system is 666, which is the number of the main worldwide computer terminal located in Brussels called the Belgium Economic Accounting and Surveillance Terminal, and as one can easily see, the BEAST. When one takes the mark of the Beast it means that **they** now, not just their computers at home, but **they personally will become a part of the Beast system**. The partitive genitive of is used to denote that the person is now a part of that thing.

2. “*But not forsaken;*” - ἀλλ ουκ εγκαταλειπομενοι

When one is in a minority, as persecuted Christians are and will be, it is easy to see why they would feel abandoned. The number of biblical Christians is a minority in comparison to the unsaved of the world. Then, out of that number of believers, only a percentage of them will be suffering persecution at any given time. And then there is the added problem of when believers are being persecuted it is quite common for other believers, friends, and even family members to distance themselves from them.

But here we have that believers, when being persecuted, will absolutely not, (emphatic negative – *ouk*), be abandoned. But what we have to keep in mind here is that the Apostle Paul is not talking about other people, he's talking about God! It is very common, rather it is actually the norm, that if you are suffering, going through a trial, or being persecuted by others, religious authorities, or governmental authorities; the vast majority of people, including family and friends, even wives, will abandon you!

But there is one who will never abandon us! There is only one that we can count on to be by our sides through thick and thin and that's the Lord. And he has promised using five negatives that **he will never, absolutely never stop sustaining us in this life nor abandon us!** “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (οὐ μὴ σε ἀνοῶ οὐδὲ οὐ μὴ σε εγκαταλιπῶ)*” Hebrews 13:5

Paul knew full well what it was like to be forsaken by his fellow believer in Christ, for when he was in trial, (persecution by the Roman authorities), all believers had forsaken him, but there was one, only one who stood by his side and strengthened him in the inner man, the Lord Jesus Christ. “*At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”* 2 Tim 4:16,17

The word *enkataleipo* meant to forsake, to abandon, to leave behind, as one would abandon a child along the road. But God promises to never do that. God is **for** us, he is **in** us and he is **with** us! If we are driven from one place to another because of persecution, then the Lord will go with us to the next place. If we are forced out of our job, then he will be with us. If we are forced out of town, he will leave along with us. If we are forced out of a relationship, then he walks away from it with us. **He will never abandon us, even if everyone else on earth does!**

But how does he do that? How does he manage to keep on sustaining us in this life and stay with us? He does this through the indwelling Holy Spirit, his omnipresence and his sustaining grace. God surrounds us with his grace. He is at our side; he goes before us in life and the battle; he protects our backs and our flanks; he has already provided everything that we will ever need in life; and he lives within our bodies.

Think about how the early Christians felt when they were persecuted for their faith in Christ. They come into a new town having new plans, hopes, ideas, etc., and then they're kicked out! What do we do now? They start a new business and it fails. What do we do now? Get married, have kids and then your spouse leaves you. What do we do now? Move to a new town, but can't get hired because you're a Christian. What do we do now? Have a faith goal, but for some reason it is taken away. What do we do now? Lose your job, lose your home, lose your friends. What do we do now? Can we not see how these believers lived with pressure, perplexity and persecution, but were victorious over all of them!