

FACING OPPOSITION AS A CHRISTIAN

John 7:1-9

by Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The NCAA basketball tournament is happening right now, and one of the Cinderella teams that made it to the Sweet Sixteen as Oral Roberts University – an evangelical Christian school in Tulsa, OK. This past week a journalist for USA Today wrote an article condemning and criticizing ORU for their stance against things like homosexuality, and she called on the NCAA to stop allowing schools like ORU from participating. So far the NCAA has not taken any action, but if they do, all eyes will be on ORU. If the NCAA says that they either need to abandon their Christian beliefs or withdraw from all college athletics, how will ORU respond?
2. This past week governor Kristi Noem, known and respected as a conservative republican, faced a similar test. The South Dakota state congress sent her a bill to sign (HB 1217) that would require all athletes participating in state sanctioned sports to compete in events that aligned with their sex determined at birth. Originally she said that she was excited about signing it, but when it finally made it to her desk, she rejected it. Now, the governor is not telling us why she reversed her position, but the assumption is that she caved under the pressure. She was likely afraid that if the law passed, that the NCAA would refuse to allow South Dakota schools from participating. As well, Amazon is planning to build a major distribution center in the state, and it is possible that if the law passes, Amazon will back out. And so she caved. What's worse is that the previous governor of South Dakota also promised to sign the bill but then backtracked.
3. Something similar occurred in North Carolina a few years ago. The North Carolina legislature passed a bathroom bill, which said that you have to use the bathroom that coincides with your biological sex. But then the NCAA threatened that it would not hold events; and professional sports teams threatened they would not hold events in NC. Major businesses said they would no longer do business in NC. And so the state caved. It reversed its position, not because they felt it would be better for young people, and safer for women, but because the political and economic pressure was too great.
4. Here's the point. You will be tested. You will face opposition for your Christian faith. This opposition might come at work; it might come at school; it might threaten your job; it might threaten your career plans; it might threaten your finances; it might threaten your relationships; it might threaten your freedom; it might threaten our church. You will be tested. You will face opposition.
5. With the culture's acceptance of homosexuality, transgenderism, and critical race theory, and the rejection of traditional Christian values, Christians are facing more opposition than ever.

6. **Charles E. Fuller** “Fellowship with God means warfare with the world.”
7. You will face opposition. You will be tested. How will you respond?
8. It is my goal that when I face opposition for my faith, I will stand firm. I will not cave. I will stand for Christ. And it is my goal that when you face opposition, you will stand firm. You will not cave.
9. Today we’re going to see a story in which Christ faced opposition. And I want to point out some lessons we can take away from His story.

II. TEXT AND EXPLANATION: John 7:1-9

1. *1 After this, Jesus traveled in Galilee, since he did not want to travel in Judea because the Jews were trying to kill him. 2 The Jewish Festival of Shelters, was near.*
 - i. Galilee is the northern region of Palestine, and Judea is in the south. Jesus spent a lot of time ministering in Galilee because the Jewish leaders in the south were trying to kill him.
 - ii. Festival of Shelters. The Jews had three great annual festivals – Pentecost, Passover, and Shelters (or Tabernacles, Booths). All Jewish males living within fifteen miles of Jerusalem were required by law to attend the festival. It was a week-long festival in which the people would take branches and make temporary shelters and stay in them all week long as a reminder of their time in the wilderness when they lived in temporary shelters and booths. The purpose of the festival was to celebrate God’s faithfulness during their time in the wilderness.
2. *3 So his brothers said to him, “Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see your works that you are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret while he’s seeking public recognition. If you do these things, show yourself to the world.” 5 (For not even his brothers believed in him.)*
 - i. His brothers. The Greek word for brothers (*adelphoi*) is the normal, ordinary, natural word for a biological brother. Roman Catholicism teaches that Jesus didn’t have any siblings, because they teach the perpetual virginity of Mary – that Mary remained a virgin for the rest of her life. This is one of the four Marian Dogmas – Mary is the Mother of God; Perpetual Virginity; Immaculate conception (she was conceived sinless without the stain of original sin and lived a sinless life); and the Assumption of Mary – she never died but was taken bodily to heaven. But the Bible teaches that Jesus had at least six siblings. It mentions four of his brothers by name – James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas (Mt 13:54-57), and it says that he had at least two sisters. The Bible never says that Mary remained a virgin the rest of her life. In fact, it only says she remained a virgin until Jesus was born (Mt 1:25). It also says that Jesus was her “firstborn son,” which means she had other children (Lk 2:7).
 - ii. His brothers pressured Jesus into going to the festival, not to worship and celebrate, but to do miracles and gain a larger following. And then it says

that his own brothers did not yet believe in him. So, it is clear that His brothers wanted him to go to Jerusalem either so they could see more evidence for themselves, or because they only saw in Jesus a political Messiah, and they wanted Him to gain the support of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem.

3. *6 Jesus told them, "My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand. 7 The world cannot hate you, but it does hate me because I testify about it—that its works are evil. 8 Go up to the festival yourselves. I'm not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come." 9 After he had said these things, he stayed in Galilee.*

i. "My time has not yet arrived, but your time is always at hand." It's not the right time for me to go to Jerusalem to reveal myself, but you can go to Jerusalem anytime you want to.

III. SEVEN THOUGHTS ABOUT FACING OPPOSITION

1. Opposition should be expected.

- i. The Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. And if they wanted to kill Jesus, then Christ's followers will face opposition, too.
- ii. **1 John 3:13** "Do not be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you."
- iii. Kevin Cochran was the fire chief for the city of Atlanta. He was also a devout Christian and Sunday school teacher. When the city council discovered that he had written a book that said that homosexuality was a sin, it fired him. That was back in 2015. Things have only gotten worse. Expect opposition.
- iv. Opposition can come in many forms.
 1. Death. Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7).
 2. Economic opposition. After the death of Stephen, a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, so all the Christians had to leave their jobs, their homes, and their possessions, and live on the run (Acts 8:1).
 3. Verbal opposition. Insults and slander. Matthew 5:11 "You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me."
 4. Physical violence. In the town of Lystra, Paul and Silas were stripped naked and severely flogged.
 5. Hatred. John 15:18 "If the world hates you, understand that it hated me before it hated you."
 6. Imprisonment. Before Paul became a Christian, he persecuted Christians. He would go house to house to arrest Christians and put them into prison (Acts 8:3).
 7. Threats. Before releasing Peter and John, the religious leaders threatened them (Acts 4:17, 21).

- 8. Laws against your religion. Before releasing Peter and John, the Jewish leaders ordered them not to speak or teach about Jesus anymore (Acts 4:17).
- v. If you are serious about following Jesus, expect opposition. It might come in the form of laughter, rejection, getting passed over for a promotion, or not getting hired; or getting fired; or not getting into the school you want; or having your business shut down; or being pressured to say or do things that are sinful; or being pressured to be silent when God wants you to speak up.
- vi. **John 15:20** “Remember the word I spoke to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

2. Opposition must not be sought.

- i. Jesus stayed away from Jerusalem because the Jews were trying to kill Him. He didn’t put Himself in harm’s way unnecessarily. He didn’t stop serving God; He just served God in Galilee rather than in Jerusalem so that He wouldn’t get killed.
- ii. The Bible promises special blessings for the persecuted. **Matthew 5:10** “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.” But this doesn’t mean we should seek out opposition and persecution.
- iii. Fire chief Kevin Cochran did not write that book so that he would get persecuted. He wrote that book to teach God’s word about men’s issues, and it lead to persecution.
- iv. Our goal is not to get persecuted. Our goal is to faithfully serve Christ. And if we can find a way to do that without being persecuted, then let’s do it. We never want to intentionally seek persecution. We want to intentionally serve Christ, and sometimes that will mean that opposition is unavoidable. But if we can avoid persecution without betraying Christ, then that’s okay.

3. Opposition must be overcome.

- i. Jesus faced two kinds of opposition in this story. On the one hand, the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were trying to kill Him. On the other hand, His own brothers were trying to pressure Him into doing something that was against God’s will; to abandon His God-given mission and adopt a new mission.
- ii. How did Jesus respond?
 - 1. He didn’t let the threat of death stop Him from carrying on His ministry. He continued to preach in Galilee.
 - 2. He didn’t let His brothers push Him off course. He stayed focused on God’s mission for His life.
- iii. Unlike the example of Governor Kristi Noem, and the politicians of North Carolina, we must overcome opposition. We must not cave in.

- iv. The call of Christianity is not to follow Jesus until it gets hard; until it gets dangerous; until it gets painful; until it gets expensive; until it gets risky. The call is to follow Jesus to the death, if necessary.
- v. **Luke 9:23 23** Then he said to them all, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me."
 - 1. Being a Christ-follower means three things:
 - a. Deny yourself: Let Christ be in charge.
 - b. Take up your cross daily: Do Christ's will no matter the cost.
 - c. Follow Him: Devote your life to His service.
- vi. One of the most inspiring examples of this is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were Jews living in the pagan land of Babylon. The king of Babylon created a statue of himself, and ordered that everyone bow down in worship to it, or else be burned alive. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down. They were thrown in the fire, but God came to their rescue.
- vii. Don't bow down.
- viii. **1 Corinthians 16:13** "Be alert, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong."

4. Opposition makes you like Christ.

- i. A Christian's goal is to imitate Christ; to become like Christ.
- ii. When you face opposition, be encouraged that this makes you like Christ.
- iii. Christ was often rejected. Most people did not believe in Him. He was hated. He was hunted down. They called Him a drunkard and a glutton. They said he was a Satan worshiper. They said He was a sinner. He was betrayed by one of closest friends. He was arrested. He was beaten and flogged. He was mocked. He was tortured. And He was killed.
- iv. If we go through life without facing opposition for our faith, do we really have faith? Are we really like Jesus?
- v. **2 Timothy 3:12** "In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
- vi. If you never face opposition for your faith, can you truly say that you are godly, or striving to be godly?
- vii. If the world never opposes us, then it means that the world accepts us, or we are flying under the radar. The only reason the world will accept us is if we are just like the world; if we are moving in the same direction.
- viii. The more we become like Christ in our character, conduct, and convictions, the more unworldly we will become, and the more the world will oppose us.
- ix. The questions we ought to be asking ourselves is why aren't we facing opposition? Why isn't the world offended by me? Why isn't the world threatened by me? Why isn't the world trying to silence me? Why isn't the world trying to shut me down?

5. Opposition does not mean you are wrong.

- i. When you face opposition, you will be told by the opposition that it is because you are bad; you are evil; you are on the wrong side of history; you are unloving; you are a bigot; you are a racist.
- ii. There is this erroneous assumption that if we were holy enough, and if we were like Jesus enough, then everyone would love us. But that's wrong.
- iii. Jesus was hated. He faced opposition on all fronts. And He wasn't wrong. He wasn't unloving. He wasn't a bigot, or a racist, or a misogynist. He was perfectly moral and loving.
- iv. If the world hates you, that doesn't mean you are wrong.
 1. If the world rejects the gospel, that doesn't mean your presentation was bad.
 2. If the world says you are a bad person, that doesn't mean you are a bad person.
 3. If the world is offended or threatened by your religion, that doesn't mean your religion is bad.
- v. We must not make it our goal to get the world to like us. The only way to get the world to like us is to stop living for Christ. Our goal is not for the world to like us. Our goal is to preach the gospel to the world, and to love the world, and for the world to see Jesus in us. Sometimes the result will be respect, but often it will be hatred.

6. Opposition often comes from family and friends.

- i. **John 7:1** "For not even his brothers believed in him."
- ii. Jesus' brothers ended up believing in Him after the resurrection. Two of His brothers wrote books in the New Testament – James and Jude. But before the resurrection, they did not believe in Him.
- iii. If you get really serious about following Jesus, you will face opposition, and that opposition will often come from your family and friends if they are not on the same path as you.
- iv. **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."
- v. What did Jesus mean here? This is hyperbole – an exaggeration used to make a point. Your love for Christ must be so great that by comparison it makes your love for everyone else seem like hatred. Bottom line: If it is ever a choice between Christ and your family, you must choose Christ. If it is ever a choice between Christ and your friends, you must choose Christ.
- vi. I was inspired by the autobiography of Nabeel Qureshi, a man who was raised in a devout Muslim home. In college he became close friends with a devout Christian, and they discussed and debated religion often. Eventually Nabeel had to admit that Christianity was true, and that Christ was real, and

he knew he needed to commit his life to Christ. But the last thing holding him back was the knowledge that if he chose Christ, his Muslim family would disown him. In the end, he chose Christ, and he family did disown him. But he never regretted his decision.

- vii. If you want to be a fully-devoted Christ follower, then you need to be willing and ready to lose your closest friends and family. But it will be worth it.
- viii. **Mark 10:29-30** 29 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and eternal life in the age to come.”
- ix. The more you lose for Christ, the more He will reward you in the age to come.

7. Opposition against Christians results from resisting evil.

- i. Finally, this story gives us insight into why the world often hates Christians.
- ii. **Matthew 7:7** “The world cannot hate you, but it does hate me because I testify about it—that its works are evil.”
- iii. The first thing I want you to see is that Christ preached against the sins of the world.
 - 1. Those who oppose Christians when we stand against abortion, and homosexuality, and transgenderism, and pornography, and premarital sex, etc., often say, “You’re not a real Christian. Christ was all about love, and acceptance, and tolerance.”
 - 2. Christ preached against the sins of the world.
 - 3. Those who oppose Christians will often say, “Jesus said not to judge.” Obviously that doesn’t mean what they think it means, because Jesus preached against the sins of the world.
 - 4. When we boldly testify against the sins of the world, we are just being like Jesus.
- iv. The second thing I want you to see is that this is very reason that we will face opposition.
 - 1. When you condemn sin, or even when you abstain, it offends the world. It convicts them. It threatens them.
 - 2. This is not new. Do you remember why John the Baptist was executed? Because he condemned the sin of Herod Antipas, the ruler of Galilee, for committing adultery with Herodias, his brother’s wife. Both Herod and Herodias were married at the time. When John condemned their sin, the had him arrested, imprisoned, and then put to death.
- v. Christians need to speak out against sin for three reasons.

1. Sin offends God. If we love God, then we must speak out against the things that He hates. Every time a sin is committed, God is offended.
2. Sin incurs God's judgment. Our family, our friends, our country will come under the wrath of God, either in this life or in the next, if they do not repent. God sent Jonah to preach against the city of Nineveh because of their great evil. Jonah told them that God was going to demolish the city in forty days. Because of his preaching, the entire city repented of their sins and was saved.
3. Sin reveals the need for Christ. Unless the world knows God's law, and sees its sin, it will not see its need for a Savior. The world would like to think that it is good and loving and moral. But it is not. And only when the world sees its deep sin, will it reach out for the Savior.

IV. CONCLUSION

1. You will face opposition as a devout Christian.
2. **Martin Luther** "Cain will go on murdering Abel as long as the church is on earth."
3. I love the story of Jack Phillips. Jack Phillips is the owner of Masterpiece Cakeshop in Colorado. He decorates cakes for a living. He called it Masterpiece as a reminder that the ultimate purpose of his business is to glorify his master, Jesus Christ. As a Christian, Jack made the decision not to design any cake that would dishonor Christ. This was a big decision, because it meant the loss of lots of business. He decided not to design cakes that would disparage other people, racist cakes, atheist cakes, anti-American cakes, cakes celebrating divorce, crude cakes for bachelor parties, and he doesn't design same-sex wedding cakes. Jack serves homosexuals all time, but he won't decorate a cake for a gay wedding. In 2012 a same-sex couple asked him to bake a cake for their wedding, and he declined. Instead of agreeing to disagree, instead of live and let live, the cussed him out, flipped him off, and left. Twenty minutes later he started receiving horrible hone calls and death threats. The homosexuals put together a boycott and a protest against his business. Eventually the Colorado Civil Right's Commission ordered Jack to design cakes for gay couples regardless of his religious beliefs, to re-educate his staff, and to file quarterly compliance reports for two years. But Jack stood his ground. Instead of caving in to the pressure, he stopped making all wedding cakes, and it cost him dearly. He lost 40% of his business and had to lay off 6 of his 10 employees.
4. That's how Christians face opposition. We don't cave in. We don't bow down. We stand firm. We hold our ground, no matter the cost.
5. **Charles Spurgeon** "When confidence in God is considered vile, we determine to be viler still."