

# Truth, Love, and Self-Sacrifice - the Weapons of Christ and the Christian

by Josef Tson

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*Developing the mind of Christ, understanding the sovereignty of God, and embracing the aggression of love can give us courage to stand under persecution.*

**Duration:** 30:55

**Scripture:** Romans 13:1

**Topics:** "Christian Love", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of the 'Aggression of Love' in the face of evil. He explains that God, in order to tackle the evil in the world, sent his son Jesus as a lamb, using the weapons of truth, love, and self-sacrifice. The preacher shares a personal experience of being interrogated in communist Romania, where he interpreted Romans 13 to mean that those who harm him are merely instruments of God. He encourages the audience to view those who intend to hurt and attack them as God's puppets, and to respond with the truth of the gospel, love, and a willingness to be persecuted.

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## Transcript

It's a very special day for me and a very happy day for me and my wife, Elisabeth, to be here. Let me tell you why I say very, very happy. First of all, 80 years ago, 1920, there was a Romanian student here.

His name was John Socaciu. He studied here and in 1921 he came back to Romania to train preachers there. And in 1950, 50 years ago, he was instrumental in leading me to know the Lord.

So, my roots are here. But then I had a very sad experience in 1983. Dr. Philip Roberts was at that time assistant to Louis Drummond here, the chair of evangelism.

And Philip tried to put together a little evangelical student group. And he invited me to be speaker to that little group, so I sneaked in. It was a sort of underground.

And as I looked to this great campus, knowing that my mentor in the faith studied here, I was so distressed. What has happened to Louisville Seminary? Well, isn't it happy to be back here and in a totally new seminary? Let me tell you that three years ago, I met with Al Moore. We were speakers together in Little Rock, Arkansas at the Conference on Revival.

And I told Al at this time. He recently told me how great encouragement that was for him at that time when he was in the thick of the battles here. I said, Al, the greatest event of the 20th century was the downfall of communism, 1989.

Almost never in history there was such a sudden turn of the direction of history as with the downfall of communism. Now listen, what you are doing in the Southern Baptist denomination generally, and in Louisville particularly, is of the same magnitude. And it will have the same kind of impact on history.

Yes, I want to assure the young students here that you are witnessing one of the greatest turns in history. And as Christianity today puts it, the only denomination in history that went on a downgrade, as the Portuguese call it, and then had the capacity to turn back. That's the Southern Baptist change.

Now, as you may see, I like to look at history, see big changes. And let me speak this morning about another big change that I live to see. And that's persecution of the Christians in America.

This is the new phenomenon that has arrived, and it's going to increase. The change started in the early 60s, when systematically through the courts, religion, Christian religion, was pushed out of the schools. Then it was pushed out of the media.

And then through the new philosophy, post-modernist philosophy, in the American culture and in American universities, a new idea came, that everybody has his own truth, there is no absolute truth. And if you dare say that you have the truth, you are intolerant. And the only crime that is now a real crime is the crime of intolerance, done by evangelical Christians.

And then the most scary thing was the new concept called hate crime. When they killed that homosexual boy in Idaho, I think, they started with this concept. It's not only crime, it's a hate crime.

And you have to punish the hate more than the crime. But then when Southern Baptists decided to continue to evangelize the Jews and the Hindus, that was called hate crime. Now, don't you see that you have all the elements of a climate of persecution of the Christians in America? And I want to tell you, like every other such event, it has the gift of snowballing.

The avalanche goes quicker and faster and more devastating. So, I was not surprised that two weeks ago we were with Al Moore at John Piper's conference, pastor's conference in Minneapolis, 900 pastors to consider the courage to stand up for the truth in present-day America. The courage to face the persecution for the truth in America.

Yes. Now, let me tell you where I come from. In my country, an Eastern Orthodox country, when my parents became Baptists, that was considered national treason.

You betrayed the religion of your forefathers. So, when I went in the school in the third grade, the children told the priest who came to teach religion there that they had a Baptist in the school. So, he called me in front and said, let me test you.

You see, Baptists were like lepers. That was the attitude. Straight or unwanted.

So, he said, make the sign of the cross. I put my hand to the back and said, no sir, that's a sin. He slapped me then.

Well, I called that my first religious experience. And then Communists came on the top of that. And we had to decide to whom do we give our mind.

To the Communist indoctrinators or we stay with Christ as ruler of our mind and our faith. And later on, when the Lord had me stand up and preach without a license, and after my first sermon there, they told me that if I continue, they will arrest me and kill me. I had to decide with my wife.

Are we ready to really, literally die for what we believe in? And so, all my ministry there in Romania was under this threat of death. But I am a theologian. I think theologically.

So, I asked the question, what's the theology of dying for Christ? What's the theology of martyrdom? And I discovered that nobody has ever thought of writing a theology of martyrdom. And I said, here is a field for research. Let me do it.

Eventually, I wrote a PhD dissertation for evangelical faculty of Belgium, entitled Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven. The first ever attempt to put together a theology of martyrdom. So, if you ever want to consider martyrdom, you have to study my book.

It was published by University Press of America. It was horrible. It was \$60 a copy.

Fortunately, they sold out. They gave us a copyright. We just reprinted it with a reasonable price.

There are forms there where you can order at my table there. Now, I was invited at this pastor's conference two weeks ago to tell them from my all-life experience with facing death for what I believe in, and with my knowledge of martyrdom and the value of martyrdom and the theology of martyrdom, to speak to these pastors on the sources of my courage. And I have a very short time here, but let me give you the heart of what I consider to be the sources of my courage.

First of all, and you have to know that you have now to go to school of suffering. You have to prepare yourself for persecution in America. So better listen carefully because this is a needed teaching now.

The most important thing is to develop the mind of Christ. And let me share with you how I understand Philippians 2, 6. Verse 5, we are told to develop the mind of Christ. And then verse 6 to 8 tell us what is the mind of Christ.

Unfortunately, all the translations of verse 6 let us down because they are afraid to translate literally what Paul said. And they all add one or two words that completely change the meaning. Here is what Paul said about the mind of Christ.

Although he existed in the form of God, he didn't consider equality with God to be harpagmon, which means rapaciousness, grasping, acquisitiveness. Listen carefully. He was told by his father to strip himself of the heavenly glory, come down, become a man, not any kind of man but a slave, to be a servant of everybody and give his life as a sacrifice for them.

And he said, well, what does equality with God mean in this situation? And I would say, rephrase it, what is the essence of being God? Staying here and saying everybody serves me, everybody gives me, and I just grasp, I have this attitude of acquisitiveness, rapaciousness. No. The essence of being God is pouring yourself out, giving yourself, emptying yourself for others, up to the self-sacrifice.

That is Christ's mentality. I think if we read in 2 Corinthians 8-9, we go a little bit further. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Although he was rich, he made himself poor so that he may enrich us. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was that he was rich. And he became, he emptied himself, he gave himself all his riches, he poured them on us.

The essence of God is this inward riches that have to be shared. Now, if I get that kind of Christ's mentality, of course, I may add there, although I will develop it in a moment in a different way, but add here the meaning of agape love as opposite to eros love. Eros love is born out of inner poverty.

And it looks and says, who can satisfy me? And it says, give me. Agape love is born out of inward richness. It's so full that it says, I explode if I don't give.

Agape love is fulfilled by giving and giving itself. That's Christ, the essence of Christ. Now listen carefully.

You are in a fantastic school. Get rich here. Get rich of the Word of God here.

But more than that, get rich of experiencing God. And praise the Lord for Brother Baccabee, and the new desire to know God personally, experiencing him. Be so full of God.

And that's Ephesians 3.19, so that you become full of all the fullness of God. And chapter 4.13, fullness of Christ. And 5.18, fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Fullness of God the Father, fullness of Christ, fullness of the Holy Spirit. Be so full that you go out and say, if I don't share, I explode. I tell you, whatever persecution comes to America, you are so rich that nobody can stop you.

You will never be discouraged, and you will never be depressed, if you have those riches inside you. But you have to learn how to become that kind of rich. And it was the fact that the Lord gave me a few teachers there in Romania, in that time of persecution, who taught me how to feed myself, who taught me how to develop that inward riches.

And I understood the beauty of just giving and giving and giving. And you know what? Given even to your persecutors. Given even to your interrogators.

And I'll tell you about that a little bit further. So, the main secret, the main source of courage to stand under persecution is developing this mind of Christ. You know, think of this, or let me let that for a moment, come to the second source of my courage.

The second source of my courage in persecution was understanding the sovereignty of God. If you understand that all your enemies are God's instruments for you, and even the persecution is orchestrated by your sovereign ruler, which is your daddy, you have the power to stand in persecution. Let me illustrate.

In October 1974, I was arrested. I was, in that first day there at the secret police, they formally read the indictment. Because of my writings and my speaking, I was charged with propaganda which endangered the security of the state.

There were six senior officers behind a long table. I was alone on a chair in front of them. Imagine that very impressive, scary picture.

A colonel reading the indictment, and then explaining how grave the situation was for me because the punishment was up to 15 years in prison. And he started to lecture me on what I had done. Now this was communist Romania, 80s Romania.

And all of a sudden that colonel said, you know Romans 13, don't you? That we are ordained of God. Now I never interrupt a speaker, certainly not there, but you know the Lord said that it's not you who speaks when you are there. It's the Holy Spirit.

So, boom, I just sort of heard myself say, Mr. Colonel, would you let me explain how I interpret, how I see Romans 13 apply here? He was sort of taken back and he said, ok, go on. I said, look sir, yes indeed, you are put here by God. You are his instruments.

Now listen what that means. It means that what happens here is not between you and me. What happens here is between my God and myself.

My God has some dealings with me here. I don't know what, maybe he wants to teach me a few lessons. I want to tell you he taught me the greatest lessons of my life there.

Sir, I only know that you will do to me only what my God decided you beforehand to do. And you will not go one inch beyond that because you are only my God's instruments. Now he didn't like that interpretation of Romans 13.

But listen, for me it was like seeing above them my sovereign ruler and father pulling six strings. See the picture? Moving his six puppets? That's sovereignty of God properly understood. Now you look around to all the people who are intent to hurt you and to attack you and to vilify you and to malign you.

And I tell you, you will have them in America, even in your churches where you will be pastors. Look to them as God's puppets for you. They are God's instruments for you.

You know how far the sovereignty of God goes? You read in Revelation 13-17 about the beast and the ten horns and you are dead scared and you calculate who they may be. Don't waste your time with that. Read chapter 17, verse 17.

The horns and the beast unite to do what God planned them beforehand to do. Look at them as monsters who are computerized and my daddy put the program in their computer. And they will only do what my father decided them to do.

So why be afraid of them? Because my father said in Romans 8-28 that everything will work for my good. That is sovereignty of God. And if you understand the sovereignty of God, then you can stand in any persecution.

But let me go another step because this is where I come to the most important thing. And that is to understand that not the evil is the aggressor. The aggressors are us.

And our aggression is the aggression of love. Let me explain again with my experience. After that first day in interrogation, I was placed on house arrest.

I had to go for interrogation every morning. And it lasted six months. Six months, eight, ten hours a day.

Two men, experts in breaking, somehow trying to break me there. After the second day in interrogation, late in the evening, I think it was eight in the evening, after a whole day of interrogation, that evil man just said, take your coat, go home, and tomorrow morning at eight be back at the battle. For the battle.

I turned gently to him and said, Sir, why do you speak like that? You should know, Sir, that every morning before I come here, I pray for you. I pray for your salvation. I pray for your family.

And then I come to meet the man for whom I just prayed. That's the attitude in which I come here. He was choked.

You could see he couldn't speak. And then he said, OK, OK, go home. Six months.

Whenever I had an opportunity, I sneaked in a testimony. Something about my relationship with my Lord. And at one point, you know, they were always two watching each other.

They never trusted each other. But one had to go to the bathroom or something, and the other would be alone for a few minutes. And those minutes he would become human.

So in such a moment, that evil interrogator looked to me and said, let me tell you something. Whenever I interrogate somebody, I feel how they hate me. And justly so, because I'm not nice with them.

But with you, with you it's different. I don't know how to put it, but you should know, it's a delight for me to be with you. And I immediately thought in myself, yes, but it's not a delight for me to be with you.

And, but then I immediately said, sorry Lord, this is one of the greatest moments of my life. This man has just told me I don't hate him, I love him. And the last day of interrogation, when he came to tell me that they decided not to put me on trial and I go free, he said, I cannot comment on those things, but I want to tell you just one thing.

I will miss you. See, that man needed me there. Now, you know, when you have this kind of experience as a preacher, you immediately make a sermon.

So I put them in a sermon for my people and I entitled that sermon, The Aggression of Love. I said, you think that they are the aggressors, they are jumping on us. That's not true.

We are the aggressors. But in order to understand, think of this. God faced the evil of the world.

And he said, how can I tackle this evil? And the evil of the world has only three things in it. Life, hate, and violence. These are the elements that Satan works with.

Life, hate, and violence. And huge, monstrous violence. And God looks and says, how can I tackle it? I know how.

And he sends them his son in the form of a lamb. And says, that's my reaction to evil. That's my solution to evil.

And Jesus comes with three things. The truth, love, and self-sacrifice. These are the three weapons of Christ.

The truth, love, and self-sacrifice. And then when he finished his part, he says, now Joseph, as my father sent me, so send I you. I send you as a lamb to the wolves.

You go there with the truth of the gospel. You go there in love and accept to be slaughtered. And when you are slaughtered, you win the greatest battle.

And it is through that that you actually win. And it is that kind of aggression that we make. Now if you capture that, if you understand that when persecution comes here, they have the lies, they have the hate, and they have the violence.

And you are here with the truth of God, the absolute truth of God, in love and ready to be slaughtered. And you win with that. And let me just add quickly because I have two more minutes.

The other very important source of courage is to understand that the suffering produces the glory. 2 Corinthians 4.16 Our momentary light afflictions produce an eternal weight of glory. Romans 8.17 If we suffer with him, we shall be glorified with him.

2 Timothy 2.12 If we suffer with him, we shall rule with him. Take them to mean what they say. It is your participation in the sufferings of Christ that makes the spirit of glory hover over you.

Peter says that in 1 Peter 4.12-14. Now you see, when a secret police officer threatened to kill me, to shoot me, I smiled and I said, Sir, don't you understand when you kill me, you send me to glory? You cannot threaten me with glory. And he looked at me and said, Look, when I threaten to tell somebody I shoot you, at least he gets scared. But you smile to your ear, you are not normal.

I am not normal. I am at least above normal. I am not natural, I am supernatural.

Because I know my life is only training for glory. The more suffering, the more troubles, the greater the glory. So, why say, stop these troubles? Because the more of them, the greater the glory up there.

And if you look at things like that, you have the courage to stand the coming persecution in America. Will you bow your head with me, just for a moment? Father, we confess that we become scared when we saw these developments here. What if this persecution becomes general against us? Now, Lord, you open our eyes to see that even this comes from your hands.

Help us to see you, a sovereign ruler, moving even our enemies as your puppets. But Lord, enrich us with the riches of Christ, so that whenever they hurt us, we just pour your riches on the ones who hurt us. May we understand this aggression of love.

May we be on the attack and not on the defense. And may we have our eyes to the glory that awaits for us, and not be afraid of the momentary life afflictions. May we have good courage, because in this tribulation where the world hates us, you have conquered, and you said that we should conquer the same way as you conquered.

And we love you, and we praise you, and at the end we will give you all the credit, and all the glory, and all the praise, and all our love in Jesus Christ. Amen.

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