

In our time with the Teacher, He warned us about the opposition that we would surely encounter from a variety of adversaries. At the times that He talked about this, we understood little of the path that He was on to the cross, and we were perplexed about His message<sup>1</sup>:

*"I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ... You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.*

His prophecy has proven out since He as the Son of God rose from the grave and we were launched into the mission of the Kingdom of God. He outlined several behaviors that we should follow when confronted: 1) be shrewd but innocent, 2) be on guard, 3) do not worry, 4) listen to the Spirit, and 5) flee if possible. But thinking back (with the help of the Holy Spirit), I remembered several responses that Jesus actually implemented when He was challenged.

- 1) There were times when He pushed back, as when He was asked by some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law to show them a miraculous sign. He gave them a sign, in a way, but clearly couched it in a way that indicated that judgment was coming to those who did not follow Him. He did not give them a miraculous sign, but warned them of condemnation for their wicked generation<sup>2</sup>.
- 2) At other times He did respond by performing a sign as a lesson. When His compassion caused Him to forgive a paralyzed man of his sins, some of the teachers of the law accused Him of blasphemy (to themselves). He knew what they were thinking and to prove their error He healed the man. He made the situation a lesson about His actual authority<sup>3</sup>.

He cast out demons also as a sign in certain cases. I remember the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, who was not really a strong adversary but a bit out of the range of Christ's main mission. He was so impressed with her reply to His apparent rebuff that He complimented her and the demon cast out from her daughter<sup>4</sup>. He cast out demons who tried to send Him away; He then rebuked them and did not allow them to speak<sup>5</sup>.

- 3) Jesus had such great capacity to respond to His adversaries with logic and scripture. This was demonstrated powerfully when Satan tempted Him. Each time Satan made an argument aimed at causing the Teacher to fall, he was answered with appropriate passages from Scripture that thwarted the attempt<sup>6</sup>.

Another incident at the other end of Christ's ministry, when He was struck by one of the high-priest's officials during the period of interrogation. Jesus responded calmly and logically with a question about why He was slapped for speaking the truth<sup>7</sup>.

- 4) Sometimes He embarrassed them by exposing their ignorance of the Scriptures. When He was presented with a trapping question from the Sadducees about the resurrection, suggesting a scenario with the afterlife with a woman who had married seven brothers in her earthly life. Jesus spoke very directly that they were in error because they did not know the Scriptures. Then He proceeded to destroy their interpretation by showing that God is not the God of the dead but of the living<sup>8</sup>.

Another instance was when He challenged their interpretation of what is lawful to do on the Sabbath, as His disciples were picking grain to eat from the field that they were walking through. The Pharisees were definitely pronouncing judgment on Him due to His leadership of His disciples and their belief in the meaning of the Sabbath. But Jesus questioned again their knowledge of the Scriptures, and used the actions of the much-honored King David to justify the actions of His followers. Then He questioned their

knowledge of one of the core passages from the Scriptures that showed how God desires mercy and not sacrifice, and made it clear that they should not have condemned the innocent<sup>9</sup>.

- 5) In contrast, He did compliment them at times, as when He had just responded to the Sadducees (described above), that even one who was out to test Him did recognize the truth. When the man complimented Christ about his choice of the Great Commandments, Christ complimented him in return and proclaimed that he was not far from the Kingdom of God<sup>10</sup>.
- 6) Another technique that Christ used was to respond to a question with a question. He did this when His authority was questioned by the chief priests and the elders. Christ replied with a question about John the Baptist's authority, knowing that His adversaries were afraid of the people and would not answer Him. Because of this, He then refused to answer the original question<sup>11</sup>.
- 7) Sometimes separation was imposed as the appropriate means of dealing with an adversary, similar to when Joseph ran away from Potiphar's wife when she tried to seduce him. I remember that Jesus insisted on such a separation when He told our brother Peter to get behind Him (assumed at some distance) as though he represented Satan<sup>12</sup>.
- 8) Associated with such separation, Jesus found solitary places, away from His opponents, for prayer<sup>13</sup> to receive strength from God, His Father. He even separated Himself from His disciples as well during the intense periods of prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane<sup>14</sup>.
- 9) No matter what level of hardship Jesus faced from His adversaries, He treated His struggles with supreme steadfastness. I know that He fasted for forty days and nights while He was being tempted by Satan and endured without breaking<sup>15</sup>. The entirety of His earthly ministry also showed His steadfast strength. And the long night and day of the Passover Supper, the prayers in the Garden, and the arrest, interrogations, and trial similarly showed his steadfastness as He stood finally before Pilate and essentially confessed that He was the Son of God<sup>16</sup>.
- 10) As He stood before His accusers and judges Christ was mostly silent, accepting His outrageous mistreatment<sup>17</sup>. He did not try to defend Himself from the false witnesses because He was committed to the will of God. He only responded to questions about being King of the Jews and Son of God<sup>18</sup>, which proved to seal His condemnation.
- 11) Not only did He keep silent, but He did not retaliate<sup>19</sup> or call on legions of angels<sup>20</sup> to come and rescue Him.

Jesus gave us some instructions on how we should deal with adversaries (such as shaking their dust off our feet<sup>21</sup>), but His examples in dealing with His opponents made a much richer set of lessons for us as we went into the fields of harvest for the Kingdom.

1. Matthew 10:16-23a.
2. Matthew 12:38-45.
3. Matthew 9:1-8.
4. Mark 7:24-30.
5. Luke 4:33-41.
6. Matthew 4:1-11.
7. John 18:19-24.
8. Matthew 22:23-33.
9. Matthew 12:1-8.
10. Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-34.22.
11. Matthew 21:23-27.
12. Matthew 16:23.
13. Mark 1:35 and Luke 4:42.
14. Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, and Luke 22:39-46.

15. Matthew 4:2, Mark 1:13, and Luke 4:1-2.
16. Matthew 26:62-64, Luke 22:66-71, and John 19:7.
17. Matthew 26:62-63a.
18. Matthew 26:63b-64, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3, and John 19:33-37.
19. 1 Peter 2:23.
20. Matthew 26:53.
21. Matthew 10:14, Mark 6:11, and Luke 9:5.

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