

# Desiring Martyrdom

Throughout history there have been people who earnestly wanted to be martyred. The first time I came across this was while reading letters that were written during the apostolic era of the church. Ignatius lived in the first century, which was a time of terrible persecution. In his epistle to the Romans he expressed a passionate desire to be killed for his faith in Jesus. Look at some of the chapter titles of that letter:

Chapter 2: Do not save me from martyrdom

Chapter 3: Pray rather that I may attain martyrdom

Chapter 4: Allow me to fall a prey to the wild beasts

Chapter 5: I desire to die

(Source: Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1, by Philip Schaff)

Ignatius isn't the only person who has desired this. There have been many others throughout church history as well. Although this desire may seem very spiritual and holy, it's *not* Biblical.

First of all, the apostles did *not* have this same view. When Paul's life was threatened he left town:

**Acts 9:24-25:** “But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a

basket.”

Paul did this throughout his life. When he was persecuted in one place he went to a different place. The apostle Peter did the same thing. When Peter was in prison awaiting his execution, the church prayed for his release:

**Acts 12:5:** “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.”

Once God miraculously freed Peter from prison, he left and went somewhere else (Acts 12:17).

There's nothing wrong with fleeing from persecution! The apostles didn't think that was cowardly or wicked. They preached the gospel in one city, and when persecution arose they left that city and went somewhere else. They *never* prayed that God would allow them to be martyred, and they never rebuked the church for praying that God would spare their lives!

It's true that in the end both Peter and Paul were martyred. When that day came they both willingly laid down their lives:

**2 Timothy 4:6:** “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.”

**2 Peter 1:14:** “Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.”

It's one thing to be willing to lay down your life for Jesus. However, it's an entirely different thing to actually seek martyrdom. The problem is that it's a serious sin in God's sight to murder an innocent person. It's *especially* a sin to murder someone for their faith in Jesus! That's a very wicked thing – *and we should never desire that people do things which are*

*abominations in God's sight*. If what we're desiring requires other people to sin then we shouldn't be desiring it!

On top of that, those who persecute people for their faith in Jesus are actually persecuting Jesus. When Saul (who later became the apostle Paul) persecuted the church, Jesus confronted him about it and told him that he had actually been persecuting Him:

**Acts 9:4-5:** "And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

People who desire martyrdom are desiring the persecution of Jesus – and that's something we should *never* want.

Do you know what the martyrs are doing in Heaven? They're crying out for justice:

**Revelation 6:9-10:** "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?"

The reason the martyrs are crying out to be avenged is because they understand that what was done to them was an enormous sin in God's sight. It was extremely evil – and they want justice to be done.

One day God will indeed avenge those who were martyred. At the end of the seven-year tribulation period the Lord will pour out a terrible judgment upon the world as punishment

for all the saints that they killed:

**Revelation 16:4-6:** “And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.”

In that time God will turn the world's water supply into blood. Since the world shed the blood of the saints, He will take away their water and give them blood instead.

It's a righteous thing in God's sight for us to lay down our life for Jesus. That's a very precious thing to Him (Psalm 116:15). However, it's an entirely different matter for us to desire that someone will murder an innocent person for their faith in Jesus. That's something we must never do. Instead God wants us to give our life to Him:

**Romans 12:1:** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

This is the sacrifice that God wants us to make! We must wholly give our lives to Him. That means we must repent of our sins and submit to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must seek His will instead of our own, and obey all of His commands. We must learn to put to death our own desires and desire what God wants instead. We must fully conform ourselves to the image of Christ so we can be as similar to Him as we can possibly be. We must then live for Him *all of the days of our lives*. That's what it means to be a living sacrifice.

Now, it's true there are times when this act of devotion

costs people their life. If that happens then we must not deny Jesus! We *must* remain faithful to His name. Regardless of what God chooses to do with our lives, though, we must remain faithful to Him.

When the apostle Paul struggled with this issue he was clear about his answer. It was better for the church for him to remain alive:

**Philippians 1:21-24:** “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”

As long as we're alive we can help one another. We can preach the gospel and meet people's needs. However, once we die we lose that ability. That's why the book of Ecclesiastes says this:

**Ecclesiastes 9:4:** “For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.”

It's true that it's far better to be with Christ than to be in this world. However, those who are still alive and in this world can help people in a way that those who are dead cannot.

If God chooses to direct our life in such a way that we become martyrs, that is indeed an honorable way to die – but that's *not* something we should seek or pray for. None of the apostles sought it, and they actively tried to avoid it as much as possible. It may sound noble but there's nothing noble about praying that other people would murder those who are innocent. That's not something we should ever do.