

Theme: Christians should expect to be ostracized and persecuted by the world for our faith.

I. Persecution and the Christian

- A. I have been coming across a lot of information about persecution recently
- B. Church history class, trip to Rome, news, petitions
- C. I am not an alarmist, but I am also concerned about future persecution in America
- D. What does the Bible teach about persecution?
- E. Is it really considered 'the normal Christian life'?

II. Persecution In the Christian Life

- A. Paul said persecution was a normal part of Christian life
In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12
 - 1. Paul assumes persecution will be there for believers
 - 2. Not a call to seek persecution to prove faith
 - 3. It is simply what believers should expect in life
- B. Persecution as normal in the New Testament
 - 1. Jesus taught this
Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' **If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.** If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. John 15:20
 - 2. Paul taught this
We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to

strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. 1 Thessalonians 3:2–4

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12

- a. Paul's earliest and last letter - same message
- b. Persecution simply part of the Christian life

3. Peter

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12–13

4. Hebrews

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³ Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Hebrews 13:12–14

III. Persecution In Church History

- A. Paul experienced much persecution throughout his life
You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, **endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.** Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 2 Timothy 3:10–11

1. You can read about these things in Acts 14
2. Timothy was from Lystra - he saw this personally
3. Iconium - a plot to stone and kill Paul and Barnabas
4. Lystra - they called Paul a god - then stoned him!
5. Remember Paul is writing these words from jail!
(Probably Mamertine prison - with Peter!)

Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. 2 Corinthians 11:23–27

1. This is Paul's resume and defense of apostleship
2. Not a list of great achievements but of suffering
3. This is the real victorious Christian life!

B. A brief glimpse at persecution in the NT

1. Book of Acts is full of persecution - mainly leaders
2. Epistles - persecution of all believers from Jews, pagan neighbors

3. In NT usually not from government - but this came!

C. Persecution in the history of the church

1. Nero's persecution - pic from his domus aurea path
2. Ignatius - bishop of Antioch, martyred around 117AD
3. Polycarp - martyred around 165 AD; quote
4. This continued through 300 AD - which was the worst persecution!
5. Only at the end was this over emperor worship
6. Mainly Christians could not fit in with the pagan, immoral culture

D. Persecution today

1. Persecution continues today as well
2. Pope Francis' words
The persecuted Christians are a concern that touches me very deeply as a pastor. What I would like to be clear on is one thing, I am convinced that the persecution against Christians today is stronger than in the first centuries of the Church. Today there are more Christian martyrs than in that period. And, it's not because of fantasy, it's because of the numbers. - Pope Francis
3. Meriam Ibrahim
 - a. Sudanese woman; Christian mother, Muslim father
 - b. Father abandoned; raised as Christian by mother
 - c. Married American Christian man had child
 - d. Pregnant with 2nd child; Muslim's claimed adultery

e. Jailed, had child; awaiting lashes and execution

4. This story is repeated countless times today

E. Persecution in America?

1. Christians have not suffered in America

2. But I really think our time is coming

3. Increasingly out of step with cultures 'morals'

4. I fully expect pressure for us to compromise

5. We must prepare now to stand when the time comes

IV. Applying the Word

A. Do we see being ostracized and persecuted is the normal Christian life?

1. As Peter said - don't think it strange

2. All wanting to live godly in Christ will suffer

3. We have tried to deny this, but that is wrong

4. There is a cost to being a disciple of Christ

5. But we gain everything in Him!

6. Wrath removed, relationship restored, truth embraced

7. The Gospel is worth the suffering!

B. How to prepare for persecution

1. Pray for those who are already suffering for Christ

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Hebrews 13:3

2. Build a biblical, eternal life perspective

a. This world is built on delusions and falsehoods

b. This age is temporal - the kingdom is eternal

c. We must not trade an eternal kingdom for temporal ease

d. If we live for this world, we will cave to its pressures

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have **longed for his appearing**.⁹ Do your best to come to me quickly,¹⁰ for **Demas, because he loved this world**, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:8–10

1. Crown awaits all who love [agape] coming of Christ

2. Demas deserted Paul because he loved [agape] this present age - as opposed to the one to come

⁹ I urge you all, obey the word of righteousness and strive with all endurance—which you also saw before your very eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius and Zosimus and Rufus, but also in others among you, and in Paul himself and the rest of the apostles, ² being persuaded that all of them “did not run for nothing” but in faith and righteousness, and that they are “in their appointed place” with the Lord with whom they also suffered. For they did not “love this present world” but him who died for us and was raised by God for our sakes. (Polycarp, Letter to Philipppians, 9:1-2)

C. Prayer for the persecuted - and ourselves

The Normal Christian Life

2 Timothy 3:10-13

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Prayer

Psalm 20:1-2

May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. ² May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. Psalms 20:1–2

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:10–13