

SERIES:
THE PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE
2 TIMOTHY 3:12

INTRO: One condition that has been around for many centuries is the PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE. We read about it in the Bible. We read about it in history books. We even read about it in newspapers and see it on television these days. But yet, we often seem to PUSH IT ASIDE and say, "YES, I KNOW PERSECUTION IS A FACTOR, BUT IT WILL NEVER EFFECT ME." Oh, we all may wish that to be true, but the fact is we all may really face persecution in the future. In July of 2013 I attended a pastors conference in California where we were told that "IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE MAJORITY OF YOU PASTORS WHO ARE HERE WILL SPEND SOME TIME IN GOVERNMENTAL HOUSING ONE OF THESE DAYS." The GOVERNMENTAL HOUSING the speaker was referring to was PRISON! His point was that many preachers alive today may one day be in prison because they PREACH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST! Only time will tell if what he said comes true but the PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE is a subject we all need to consider whether we want to or not. Thus in the course of this series we will observe the "REALITY AND THE RESPONSE TO THE PERSECUTION OF GOD'S PEOPLE."

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CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION TODAY

By
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"We live in an age of increasing persecution of Christians around the world, and, with shocking disregard, the general media are not covering it. The Center for Study of Global Christianity in Massachusetts estimates about 100,000 Christians a year were murdered between 2000 and 2010 but reports the number of Christians killed last year (2013) nearly doubled verses 2012, to 2123. Eight out of 10 acts of religious discrimination are directed at Christians, says the International Society for Human Rights. The Pew Research Center reports that between 2006 and 2010, Christians were discriminated against in 139 countries, more than 70 percent of all the nations on the planet."

"In the Middle East, innocent followers of Christ are being hunted down and slaughtered in ancient communities that date back to as early as the first century. Islamatic fanatics have been savaging Christians in Iraq, heirs to the Word of Christ delivered by the Apostles Thomas and Thaddeus. In Nigeria, Islamist terrorists kidnap Christian girls and sell them into slavery. Boko Haram, the Islamist extremist group has murdered 1,631 Christians in Nigeria in the first half of 2014. The Christian faith has been virtually wiped out in North Korea and Myanmar."

Closer to home we may not see the PERSECUTION as is seen in other parts of the world, but DISCRIMINATION that leads to PERSECUTION is growing every day. Just recently Kendra Turner of Dyersburg Tennessee, an 18 year old Christian said "BLESS YOU" after a fellow classmate sneezed, which was common courtesy to her, but in doing so she was rebuked by her teacher at Dyer County High School and thrown out of class.

On August 19, 2014 the New York Times reported that ISIS (The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) "actually beheaded Christian children and put their heads on a stick in Mosul Park."

THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AND PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS AROUND THE WORLD IS REAL WHICH BEHOOVES US TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

- 1) PRAY FOR CHRISTIANS BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AND PERSECUTED.**
- 2) DO WHAT WE CAN TO STAND WITH THOSE CHRISTIANS BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AND PERSECUTED.**
- 3) PREPARE OURSELVES FOR DISCRIMINATION AND PERSECUTION BEFORE WE FACE IT DIRECTLY.**

TO PREPARE OURSELVES FOR POSSIBLE PERSECUTION WE SHALL OBSERVE TWO COMPONENTS IN THIS SERIES:

- I. THE REALITY OF PERSECUTION
- II. THE RESPONSE OF PERSECUTION

NOTE: THIS SERIES IS NOT BEING CONDUCTED TO BRING FEAR INTO OUR LIVES, BUT RATHER TO PREPARE AND EQUIP US FOR ANY PERSECUTION THAT MAY COME OUR WAY IN THE FUTURE. AFTERALL, THE STUDY OF THE WORD OF GOD REVEALS THE PERSECUTION HAS BEEN, IS, AND WILL BE A MAJOR ASPECT IN THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO ARE GOD'S PEOPLE. IN AMERICA WE HAVE BEEN

BLESSED BY ITS ABSENCE, BUT THAT MAY NOT ALWAYS BE THE CASE. SO WE SHALL STUDY THE WORD OF GOD TO SEE WHAT GOD EXPECTS OF US IN THE FACE OF PERSECUTION.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “PERSECUTION.”

The biblical word “PERSECUTION” MEANS *“TO PUT TO FLIGHT.”*

EXAMPLES:

Acts 8:4 – The disciples were “scattered abroad” preaching the Word.

Acts 9:22-25 – Paul was forced to flee Damascus

Acts 13:50 – Paul was forced to flee Pisidian Antioch

Acts 14:6 – Paul was forced to flee Iconium

Acts 17:10 – Paul was forced to flee Thessalonica

THE REALITY OF PERSECUTION

2 TIMOTHY 3:12

The context of this verse is in the description of what will take place in the last days...in which we live.

I. PERSECUTION IS CERTAIN

“SHALL Suffer Persecution”

-Jesus Christ Himself warned about Persecution

A. Matthew 5:10,11

B. John 15:18-21

ILLUSTRATION:

II. PERSECUTION MUST BE ACCEPTED

“Shall Suffer PERSECUTION”

-This phrase “SHALL SUFFER PERSECUTION” is a fact we must accept.

ILLUSTRATION;

III. PERSECUTION WILL BRING SUFFERING

“Shall SUFFER Persecution”

A. Suffering in the way of Discrimination

1. Cannot pray at football games
2. Cannot hang the Ten Commandments
3. Cannot take a Bible to School
4. Cannot pass out Gospel Tracts

B. Suffering in the way of Prison

1. The Prophets of the Old Testament
-Jeremiah – Jeremiah 32:2
2. The Apostles of the New Testament
-Paul and Silas – Acts 16:19-24
3. Rob and Paul Schenck – Buffalo, NY

C. Suffering in the way of Death

1. The first Christian Martyr – Stephen – Acts 7:54-60
2. The Martyrs who followed
 - a. The Apostles
 - b. The Christians put before lions, burned at the stake, etc.

ILLUSTRATION:

IV. PERSECUTION IS TO BE ENDURED

A. Romans 8:36

B. 2 Corinthians 11:23-25

ILLUSTRATION:

V. PERSECUTION WILL INCREASE AS WE GET CLOSER TO THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

2 Timothy 3:13

ILLUSTRATION:

VI. PERSECUTION DEMANDS CONTINUENCE IN SERVICE

2 Timothy 3:14

ILLUSTRATION:

THE RESPONSE TO PERSECUTION

If persecution is a normal component for those who are God's children, then we in our era of time must learn how to respond to it from the biblical perspective.

I. THE PRESENCE OF PERSECUTION

The Persecution of God's Children has been and is found in every age.

A. In the Old Testament

1. 1 Kings 19:2 – Elijah
2. Jeremiah 20:2 – Jeremiah
3. Daniel 3:20 – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

B. In the Jewish Nation

-Psalm 83:4

C. In the Gospels

-Mainly focused on Christ – Luke 4:29

D. In the Acts

1. Acts 8:1 – The Infant Church
2. Acts 12:1-5 – James and Peter
3. Acts 14:19 – Paul

E. In the New Testament

-1 Thessalonians 2:14,15 – The Thessalonians believers

ILLUSTRATION:

II. THE PREDICTION OF PERSECUTION

A. The Words of Christ to the First Disciples

1. John 15:20
2. John 16:2

B. The Words of Christ to the Church

-Revelation 2:10

ILLUSTRATION:

III. THE PROSPECT OF PERSECUTION

As taught as a part of the Christian life in 1 Peter

- A. A Part of our Calling – 1 Peter 2:19-21
- B. A Source of our Happiness – 1 Peter 3:14-17
- C. An Opportunity to Glorify God – 1 Peter 4:13-16
- D. A Process for Maturity – 1 Peter 5:10

ILLUSTRATION:

IV. THE PURPOSE OF PERSECUTION

A. From Satan's Perspective

Satan is the Father of Terrorism and Persecution

1. To Instill Christians with Fear
2. To Bring Christianity to Naught
3. To Shame Christians for their Faith
4. To Discourage Christians from Standing Firm in the Faith
5. To Oppose the Total Work of God

B. From God's Perspective

God has a high purpose for the Persecution of His people. He does NOT cause it, but He will allow it for certain purposes. This is seen in the Book of Philippians the first chapter.

1. To Further the Gospel – Philippians 1:12
2. To Witness for Christ – Philippians 1:13
3. To Embolden Believers – Philippians 1:14

C. From the Believer's Perspective

Even though persecution is terrible, positive results occur as the result of the persecution of God's people.

1. Persecution Builds Patience (Endurance) – James 1:3
2. Persecution Brings Reward – 1 Peter 1:7
3. Persecution Brings Strength – 1 Peter 5:10

ILLUSTRATION:

V. THE PREPARATION FOR PERSECUTION

Wise Christians WILL NOT WAIT until some form of persecution hits before they prepare. One who does wait will be OVERWHELMED and may fail the test of persecution. One who does prepare NOW will be able to face persecution effectively and even for the glory of God.

- A. Principle One: Focus on what to Expect
- B. Principle Two: Grow in your Faith Now
- C. Principle Three: Build a close relationship with God Currently
- D. Reflect upon what Others have Experienced
 1. The Old Testament Prophets – James 5:10
 2. The New Testament Apostles – Acts 7:54-60
 3. The Preachers and Missionaries of the Church Age
-“FOXES BOOK OF MARTYRS”

ILLUSTRATION:

VI. THE PERSISTENCE OF PERSECUTION

With the understanding that persecution is going to become more prevalent as we get closer to the return of Christ, now is the time to build within our lives certain components that will enable us to persevere when we face it directly.

- A. Component One: Determine to Obey God and not Man – Acts 4:29
- B. Component Two: Continue in what you have learned – 2 Timothy 3:17
- C. Component Three: Follow the Faith of Others – Hebrews 12:1a
- D. Component Four: Remain Pure before God – Hebrews 12:1b
- E. Component Five: Run the Christian Race with Patience
–Hebrews 12:1c
- F. Component Six: Look unto Jesus – Hebrews 12:2,3
- G. Component Seven: Focus on the Rapture – 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10
- H. Component Eight: Refuse to get bitter toward the persecuter – Acts 7:60
- I. Component Nine: Pray for those who persecute us – Matthew 5:44

ILLUSTRATION:

CONCLUDING APPLICATIONS

- 1) Do not deny the possibility of Persecution for your Faith in your life. If you are living godly, you will face some sort of persecution and may have done so already.
- 2) Remember that persecution has not been the extreme for Christians since the time of Christ, but rather the expected. That will remain the same until Christ returns.
- 3) Realize that it is the highest form of honor to be persecuted for the cause of Christ.
- 4) Let us lay aside our silly opinions and determine to mature in Christ so that when persecution comes along we will be strong enough to stand victoriously.
- 5) Let's determine to stand with others in every way possible who are being persecuted now around the world for their faith in Christ
- 6) Do not be caught off guard when acts of persecution come your way. Ask God strengthen you now so that you will stand firm in His might then.
- 7) Contend for the faith now so that others will learn the truth and come to Christ which will defer the intensity of persecution currently.
- 8) Let's not fear potential persecution but apply 2 Timothy 1:7 which says, *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”*
- 9) Let's ask God NOW to build a level of spiritual boldness within our lives that will enable us to stand firm in the face of persecution when it comes our way.