



Introduction

Hundreds of thousands of people today are being killed, brutalized, sold as slaves, imprisoned, tortured, threatened, discriminated against and arrested solely because they are Christians. They are being subjected to persecution and suffering simply because of their faith.

Jesus promised that those who were his followers would be persecuted. So it is not surprising that the Bible has much to say about how we are to react to persecution. This study will provide a framework for helping you deal with persecution in ways that are pleasing to God.

The Prediction of Persecution

Jesus left no doubt when it came to persecution. He told his followers exactly what they could expect.

¹⁸ "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ 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 15:18-20

- Circle the reason you can expect the world to hate you.
- Underline the reason you can expect to be persecuted.
- *Jesus is not implying that we should give the world a reason to hate us. Rather, He indicates that if you live as He did, you can expect to receive the same kind of treatment He received.*

Many years later, Peter wrote to encourage the brethren who were experiencing persecution first hand.

¹² 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

- Circle the expectation they should have concerning painful trials.
- Underline the reason they should rejoice.
- *Peter contended that persecution was to be expected and not treated as something strange or surprising.*
- **Why do you think that we are instructed to rejoice when we are persecuted?**

Paul also spoke about the expectation of persecution.

A Word About Suffering

God uses all kinds of suffering to help bring about godliness in the lives of believers. Natural disasters, sickness, hunger and accidents all bring suffering that God uses for His purposes.

But persecution is a special kind of suffering. It is inflicted upon a person of faith simply because of what they believe. This study focuses on suffering that results from persecution.

The World

When Jesus refers to the **world**, He refers to the men and women who populate the earth and seek the things the earth has to offer.



For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him,

Philippians 1:29

- Underline that which has been granted to believers.
- Circle the one for whom the suffering is experienced.
- *When something is granted to someone, it is normally counted as a good thing, even a privilege. Does persecution sound like a privilege? Why or why not?*

Sources of Persecution

Persecution can come from friends or from enemies. It can come from those who loved us in the past. Consider Jesus' warning:

³⁵ *For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law- ³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'*

Matthew 10:35-36

* * *

You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death.

Luke 21:16

- Circle the identities of those who might turn against you.
- Underline the actions they may take against you.
- *Jesus does not intend for you to turn against your family members. Rather, he is predicting that if you choose to follow Him, your family members will turn against you. Why do you think family would turn against one who has believed in Jesus?*

Governments also are a source of persecution.


¹⁸ *On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

Matthew 10:18-20

- Circle the identities of those before whom you may be brought.
- Underline the reason you might be brought before them.
- Underline the thing you are **not** to do when preparing for your defense.
- Draw a box around the reason you are not to prepare a defense (verses 19-20).
- Notice the reason God is not keeping you from the captive control of governments: He intends to speak through you to those in authority!

Family Trouble

Jesus' terms of discipleship require that those who follow Him must love Him more than their own family.

 Matthew 19:29
 Luke 9:59-62
 Luke 14:26

To learn more about the commitments required of a disciple, review the **vDRC** materials entitled **The Call to Discipleship**. You can find it in the **Discipleship Study** Section, in the **Discipleship Basics** Group on the www.vdrc.org website.

Persecution seems to pass through **three phases**.

The **first** is **disinformation**. Disinformation begins more often than not in the media. Through printed articles, radio, television and other means, Christians are robbed of their good reputation and their right to answer the accusations made against them.

The public opinion that easily results from being constantly fed such disinformation will not protect Christians from the **second** step, which is **discrimination**. Discrimination relegates Christians to a 'second-class' citizenship with inferior legal, social, political and economic standing.

The **third** stage is **persecution**. Once the first two steps have been taken, persecution can be practiced without normal protective measures taking place. Persecution can arise from the state, the police or military, extreme organizations, mobs, paramilitary groups, or representatives of other religions.

Johan Candelin, World Evangelical Fellowship

People of religion can also be the source of persecution. Consider Paul's experience in Lystra.

¹⁹ Then some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and won the crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. ²⁰ But after the disciples had gathered around him, he got up and went back into the city. The next day he and Barnabas left for Derbe.

Acts 14:19-20

- Circle the group of people responsible for influencing the crowd.
- Underline the way they treated Paul.
- Notice the reason Paul walked away from the attack, after his attackers left him for dead.

Persecution's Effect

The obvious effect of persecution is that the one being persecuted suffers. But God would not allow the suffering if there were not a greater good achieved.

¹ And Saul was there, giving approval to [Stephen's] death. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. ⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Acts 8:1-4

- Underline in verse 1 the way that believers responded to the persecution.
- Circle in verse 4 the thing done by those that were scattered.

Persecution serves not only as a means of scattering the church. It also helps to encourage those who are watching.

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Philippians 1:12-14

- Circle why Paul was in chains.
- Underline the effect that Paul's imprisonment had upon the other brethren.
- **Why do you think that onlookers would be encouraged to speak fearlessly as a result of someone else's persecution?**

Religious persecution in the First Century consisted of opposition from the Jews. Today, persecution towards Christians comes from many religions.

Sometimes believers get so comfortable in their church that they forget their primary mission is to go into all the world. God used persecution as a means to disburse the church so that others would hear.

Persecution also creates opportunities for those who are persecuted to share with those who are doing the persecution.

¹² "But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. ¹³ This will result in your being witnesses to them.

Luke 21:12-13

- Underline in verse 12 why you might be persecuted.
- Circle in verse 13 the result of standing before kings and governors.



Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Acts 16. As a result of the witness of their lives, the jailer and his whole family became believers. It's a story worth reading!

Reacting to Persecution

Examples of how to react to persecution are abundant in the Bible.

³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Hebrews 10:32-36

- Underline in verse 32 how they responded to suffering.
- Circle the things in verse 33 to which they were exposed.
- Circle those with whom they sympathized.
- Underline the affliction they joyfully accepted.
- Draw a box around the reason they needed to persevere.

The way we should react to persecution is also something about which James wrote.

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. ⁴ Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4

- Circle how we are to react to trials.
- Underline the quality that results from the testing of your faith (verse 3).
- Circle in verse 4 the end result of perseverance.
- *The Greek word **hupomone**, translated as **perseverance** in this verse has the underlying implication of "patient steadfastness". It means that you stick it out without giving up. Such perseverance brings about maturity.*



An example of a joyful response to persecution is found in Acts 5:40-41

Difficulties, limitations, hindrances, bereavements and losses, though we shrink exceedingly from them, are the very agencies that God uses to cause us to grow. As an infant has its limbs developed by means of exercise and nourishment. . . so, in a spiritual sense, is the Christian made strong by adversity.

George Mueller

Paul relates his personal reason for welcoming persecution.

⁹ *But [Christ] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.* ¹⁰ *That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

- Underline why grace is sufficient for those who are suffering.
- Circle that about which Paul boasted.
- Underline in verse 10 the afflictions Paul welcomed.
- Circle his reason for welcoming them.

The entire book of 1 Peter was written as an encouragement to the persecuted church. In his instruction, Peter draws upon Jesus' example as a means of describing how we should react to persecution.

²¹ *To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.* ²² *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."* ²³ *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

1 Peter 2:21-23

- Underline what Christ left for us.
- Circle the one in whose steps we should follow.
- Underline how Christ reacted when he was insulted.
- Circle how He reacted when He suffered.
- **Describe in your own words how you think one who has "entrusted himself to the one who judges justly" should respond to persecution.**

Grace is that provision of God, which we want, but do not deserve. It is God's gift to us.



Paul's experiences of hardship and persecution are listed and documented in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27

Peter has much to say about persecution and suffering.

1 Peter 2:20
1 Peter 3:17
1 Peter 4:1
1 Peter 5:8-10



Review

In your own words, write a summary paragraph for each of the sections of this study. Include in your summary the key teachings of that section.

The Prediction of Persecution

Sources of Persecution

Verses in each section:

John 15:18-20
1 Peter 4:12-13
Philippians 1:29

Matthew 10:35-36
Luke 21:16
Matthew 10:18-20
Acts 14:19-20

Persecutions Effect

Acts 8:1-4
Philippians 1:12-14
Luke 21:12-13

Reacting to Persecution

Hebrews 10:32-36
James 1:2-4
2 Corinthians 12:9-10
1 Peter 2:21-23

Application

Write the full text of the verse you are applying.

Don't Skip the

Application

**Applying God's Word to
your life is the most
important part of study.**

State what the verse mean to you personally?

Spend some time asking God to show you what it is that He wants to build into your life as a result of this study.

Then, record your impressions in the application section.

State what you feel your need is.

State what you are going to do.

State how you plan to check-up on yourself.