



Nearly 60 years ago, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirmed that “everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance” (Article 18).

Unfortunately, this proved insufficient to meet the needs of the religious community, so in 1981, 33 years later, the UN approved the *Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief*. The result? Twenty five years later, the UN Special Rapporteur admits that “contentious religious issues have probably not diminished.” In fact, she “has observed a marked increase in the level of religious intolerance in many regions of the world.” Both Governments and non-State actors are identified as contributors to the problem. Furthermore, “people of all religions...are victims of religious intolerance...[and] religious motivations can often be at the origin of religious intolerance” (A/61/340).

Moral, political, and international declarations are not changing the situation. More Christians have been martyred in the past 100 years than in all prior 1900 years combined. And the persecution of Christians is growing. In many nations—right now—Christians are persecuted, tortured, imprisoned, and even martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ. According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are being denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith. Furthermore, an additional 400 million Christians “suffer non-trivial systematic discrimination and restrictions on their religious liberties.”

As Paul Marshall notes in his book, *Their Blood Cries Out*, “Perhaps more important than what [Christians] *do* is who they *are*.” He concludes that many Christians are “persecuted simply because they are Christians. Their usually peaceful and quiet beliefs stand as a rebuke to those who are corrupt, to those who cannot tolerate the presence of any view but their own, and to those who want to make their own political regime the only focus of loyalty.” Christians are not persecuted because they are a threat or a detriment to society, but rather because they are, as Marshall notes, “silent witnesses” to the power and sovereignty of God.

To these men and women of faith, Jesus said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad!” The rest of us are urged to “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10).

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1. The beatitudes state that even if you are meek and merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker, you will be (*when*, not *if*) be persecuted. How have *you* been persecuted? How could you have avoided it?
 2. Carefully read Matthew 5:10-12 and identify the following. What else do you find in Luke 6:22-23, 26?

<i>What</i>	<i>Who</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Reason</i>
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Blessed
(x2)
 3. Why will Christians be persecuted? (2 Timothy 3:10-13; Matthew 24:4-14; John 15:18-21)
 4. How shall we then live? (1 Corinthians 4:11-13; 2 Corinthians 4:4-18; 12:9-10; Hebrews 13:3)

*“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)*

Matthew 5:10-12

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. **12** Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew 24:4-14

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. **5** For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. **6** You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. **7** Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8** All these are the beginning of birth pains. **9** **"Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10** At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, **11** and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. **12** Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, **13** but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. **14** And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

John 15:18-25

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. 21** They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.

2 Corinthians 1:7-11

7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. **8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9** Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. **10** He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, **11** as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.

2 Corinthians 4

4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. **7** But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; **9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **11** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18** So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

1 You know, brothers, that our visit to you was not a failure. **2 We had previously suffered and been insulted in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in spite of strong opposition.**

1 Thessalonians 2:13-16

13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe. **14 For you, brothers, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, 15** who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God

and are hostile to all men **16** in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last.

2 Timothy 3:10-13

10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, **11** persecutions, 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.

Hebrews 11:36-40

36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. **37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- 38** the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. **39** These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. **40** God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

1 Peter 2:18-25

18 Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. **19** For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. **20** But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **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 5:8-11

8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **9** Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. **10** And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. **11** To him be the power for ever and ever. Ame

How to avoid persecution:

"The way to avoid persecution is obvious and easy. To live like the world, or at least to "live and let live," will cost us nothing. To mimic the world's standards, or never to criticize them, will cost us nothing. To keep quiet about the gospel, especially the truth that apart from its saving power men remain in their sins and are destined for hell, will cost us nothing. To go along with the world, to laugh at its jokes, to enjoy its entertainment, to smile when it mocks God and takes His name in vain, and to be ashamed to take a stand for Christ will not bring persecution. Those are the habits of sham Christians" (John MacArthur, p 222 *Matthew*)