

What is persecution?

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Life Issues › Suffering and persecution

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The Bible tells that followers of Jesus will be persecuted when they live godly lives in godless societies (2 Timothy 3:12). This is no surprise: following Jesus means following in His steps. He also was persecuted. In His last major teaching, Jesus reminded the disciples about the reactions of the world. He contrasted the love of believers with hatred of the world (John 15:18; 15:21). Elsewhere He says: “In fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God” (John 16:2). Paul thought like that before his conversion (see Philippians 3:6).

Some Christians think that the Lord will protect us from any suffering. He is powerful to do so, right? Yes, He is indeed. But again: Scripture makes it very plain that Christians are subject to all the causes of suffering common to men, plus the added persecution that comes with taking a clear stand for Christ. A false teaching stresses that if you only have enough faith, you can avoid

suffering and persecution. Persecution is a defeat in their eyes. However, in reality it is rather a mark of victory (Luke 6:22-23). And in all that may come, Christ will always be with us in every experience. That's his last and final promise that has comforted millions of people in difficult circumstances: "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

I suffer some hardships because of others. Is this persecution?

Many people think persecution for your faith is only when someone points a gun to your head and demands that you deny Christ. But persecution is much more than that. Often it is a process that could eventually lead to the point that we just described. This process normally has three stages which can help you discern what you have to endure now.

Disinformation. Before full blown persecution, there will be all kinds of disinformation about followers of Christ. Media are in these cases often messengers of how bad Christians can be. By doing so, they slowly but steadily

rob Christians of their reputation and they accuse them falsely in many different ways.

Discrimination. Discrimination hasn't always to be in an active way. But the result is nevertheless the same: a second-class citizenship for followers of Christ. Their status is considered to be inferior. This applies from a legal, social, political and economic perspective.

Persecution. In this stage, due to the previous stages, people already hate you, exclude you, insult you and reject your name as evil. This is exactly what Jesus foretold in Luke 6:22. It can be summed up in the acronym HEIR: Hate, Exclude, Insult and Reject. But in all of this, we are heirs, inheritors of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17; Titus 3:7).

It can be helpful for you to recognize the situation. In all cases, it is wise to do what you can to stop a further development of this process of persecution. Make your circumstances known to the worldwide body of Christ, document the incidents, look for an advocate and exercise all legal rights you have.

What can I do to be prepared for persecution?

There are quite some important things you can do right now in order to prepare yourself for persecution. Indeed, if you don't do some of these things right now, you might regret this later since those habits can help you greatly in such times. But they have to be developed over time and that's why you should start now. Therefore, make it your habit to:

Know God's Word

Have an abiding faith in Him, which results in communication with Him

Daily submit to the Holy Spirit

Know that other believers are praying for you and pray for others as well

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