



GREAT COMMISSION LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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Persecution and the Great Commission Christian

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is vital that we remember this truth: We will suffer opposition and persecution. How do we respond when we are opposed in our faith? How can a leader prepare the church for persecution? This article by John Hopley answers these and other questions related to persecution and the Great Commission Christian.



Persecution and the Great Commission Christian

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Consider the following stories, all of which occurred in Great Commission churches in the United States:

- *A newly saved Christian is rejected by his family because of his faith.*
- *A pastor is escorted away by the police for preaching the gospel on a college campus.*
- *Because some parents in their state have been put in jail for home schooling their children, a father and mother move their family out of their state in order to educate their children at home.*
- *A college student is given a lower grade on his test because he is vocal about his biblical convictions.*
- *After a pastor is threatened with physical harm by someone who is later arrested and jailed, the church establishes a policy to provide bodyguards to any pastor speaking on Sunday morning.*
- *While preaching the gospel on a street corner a small group leader is physically abused by a passerby.*
- *A pastor finds out that a website has been created by an antagonist for the sole purpose of mocking and reviling him.*
- *A church is labeled as a cult on the Internet.*

"So, if you are a Christian looking for an easy ministry in a post-Christian culture where Christians are a minority, you are unrealistic in your outlook. It was not to be so in Jeremiah's day, and it cannot be so in ours."

-Francis Shaeffer

Every group of churches that is serving Jesus Christ will have stories like this. As believers in Jesus Christ, we must realize that persecution is part of walking with God—especially when we are actively advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16: 9: *“For a wide door for effective service has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”* The opposition we face in the United States is mild in comparison to what our fellow-Christians experience in other countries. However, we must be prepared for persecution in whatever form it comes, particularly in light of the increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States in recent years.

This article addresses this very important aspect of the Christian life: Persecution and the Great Commission Christian.

1. Persecution and the grace of God.

Our God is a God of grace. He loves us, He forgives us, and He showers His grace on us. His grace comes to us in many ways. And one way is through persecution.

Throughout the history of the church, some of the greatest gospel advances have occurred in persecuted countries. Although this may not seem logical to us, it is nonetheless true. As Tertullian said: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Richard Wurmbrand, who suffered under communism, gives this insight on the relation between persecution and the advancement of the gospel:

Persecution has always produced a better Christian—a witnessing Christian, a soul-winning Christian. Communist persecution has backfired and produced serious, dedicated Christians such as are rarely seen in free lands. These people cannot understand how anyone can be a Christian and not want to win every soul they meet.

On one hand, we are to pray for peace in our country so that the gospel might spread (1 Timothy 2:1-4). On the other hand, we see in the book of Acts that the word of the Lord multiplied greatly during times of persecution. In Acts 5, after the apostles were flogged (v.40) we see that they continued to preach Jesus as the Christ in the temple and house to house (v. 42.) After the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7) and the subsequent persecution (8:1), the believers went about “preaching the word” (8:4). And after being opposed in Ephesus, Paul continued to speak out boldly, resulting in everyone in that region hearing the gospel (Acts 19:10).

Based on the testimony of the first century believers, we who desire to fulfill the Great Commission should not be afraid of persecution. Although we pray for times of peace, our main desire is not times of tranquility but the advancement of the gospel. As His followers, it is important that we have the mature perspective that persecution may be a vital part of God’s gracious plan to fulfill this mission.

2. All godly Christians will face some sort of persecution.

Jesus warned His disciples that we would be hated by those who hated Him:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20).

Those who follow Christ in this age will receive many blessings—and also, persecutions. Just as we should expect eternal life in the age to come, we should expect persecutions in the present age:

“Jesus said, ‘Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life’” (Mark 10:29-30).

For God’s sake, we may suffer persecution:

“If you live in such a manner as to stand the test of the last judgment, you can depend upon it that the world will not speak well of you.”

-Alistair Begg

“Persecution is simply the clash between two irreconcilable value-systems.”

-John Stott

“Because for Your sake I have borne reproach; Dishonor has covered my face” (Psalm 69:7).

“You who know, O LORD, remember me, take notice of me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. Do not, in view of Your patience, take me away; know that for Your sake I endure reproach” (Jeremiah 15:15).

If we are representing Jesus well, we may suffer persecution. Persecutors are really persecuting Jesus:

“And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ And he said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting’” (Acts 9:4-5).

The apostle Paul also affirmed that those who follow Christ will suffer persecution:

“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12).

This is a very sobering verse. According to 2nd Timothy 3:12, Christians who aspire to live godly in Christ Jesus will receive some form of persecution at some point in their lives. Some may say in response, “Is this really true? I know many godly Christians who do not receive opposition.”

There are several answers to this objection. First, there is a form of “corporate persecution” that we all experience as believers. We are one body in Christ. When one Christian is persecuted, the rest of Christ’s body suffers to some degree.

Second, some suffer much more than others because of their zeal for Christ. Persecution is often closely tied to obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, given in Matthew 28:19-20. Christians and churches that are not actively making disciples—reaching lost people in their community—may not receive much persecution. But those that are more vocal in their faith will likely suffer much more. Also, churches that do not have a strong teaching that Christians are to obey the commands of Christ may also not suffer great persecution. But if a church is reaching the lost—resulting in radically changed lives and changes in social relationships in obedience to God’s Word—persecution will likely follow. Remember: Persecution occurred in the book of Acts as the apostles were actively sharing the gospel and people’s lives and social relationships began changing.

Third, the context of 2 Timothy 3:12 is one missionary speaking to another missionary. There is a far greater cost to pay when someone is leading out as a missionary into new territories that are hostile to the gospel.

Finally, the emphasis of this verse is on “desiring to live godly in Christ Jesus.” Our goal is not to seek persecution but to live a godly life. On the one hand someone should not be overly introspective if he or she is not being persecuted. On the other hand, Jesus said, “*Woe to you when all men speak well of you*” (Luke 6:26). If a Christian has never received opposition or persecution, perhaps he or she should ask God, “Lord, am I really living a life that is honoring to you? Am I being timid in sharing Christ with people? Am I shrinking back from obeying your commands because of a fear of man?” A healthy humility before God, in which we allow Him to speak into our lives, is always good.

3. There are people who are actively opposing and persecuting Christians.

Many Christians are naïve to the fact that some people are actively working to hurt or destroy those associated with Christ, just as there were people who worked to destroy Christ Himself.

“And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him” (Luke 19:47).

The Greek word for persecution is also translated “pursue.” [For example, “Flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace...” (2 Timothy 2:22) and “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12, emphasis mine).]

There are individuals who are actively pursuing (persecuting) Christians to hurt them. The apostle Paul also was “pursued”:

“[I, Paul was] serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19).

As Christians, we need to be prepared for the worst if we are going to follow Christ. We must remember that the devil inspires persecution:

“And Satan entered into Judas who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Him to them. They were glad and agreed to give him money” (Luke 22:3-5).

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this: ‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells’” (Revelation 2:10-13).

“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him” (Zechariah 3:1).

4. Opposition comes from non-religious and religious people.

Persecution comes through various sources.

- *The world: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:18). (See also 1 John 3:13.)*
- *Earthly governments: “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony”*

“Therefore, I bind these lies and slanderous accusations to my person as an ornament; it belongs to my Christian profession to be vilified, slandered, reproached and reviled, and since all this is nothing but that, as God and my conscience testify, I rejoice in being reproached for Christ's sake.”

-John Bunyan

(Mark 13:9). (See also 1 Kings 19:2; Nehemiah 6:1,9; Esther 3:6; Psalm 119:161; Jeremiah 38:6; Daniel 3:13-17; Matthews 10:17; Acts 12:1-3.)

- *Religious people:* “But the high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with jealousy; and they laid hands on the apostles, and put them in a public jail” (Acts 5:17, 18). (See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16; Jeremiah 26:8; Amos 7:12-13; Matthew 23:34-37; Acts 4:27-29; 22:4.)
- *Family and friends:* “And a man’s enemies will be the members of his household” (Matthew 10:36). (See also Micah 7:6; Genesis 4:8; Matthew 10:21; Mark 3:21; Galatians 4:29.)

Because we are Christians, we should expect to receive some opposition from the world. That persecution becomes more intense when the persecution is supported by earthly governments, as is the case in some Islamic countries. Also, persecution can come from religious and non-religious people. The religious leaders handed Jesus over to the secular leaders to be crucified. Paul was persecuted by Gentiles, as well as the religious leaders of his day (Acts 20:19).

Although true believers will generally support their fellow Christians, it is common to receive opposition from professing Christians. In fact, oftentimes the worst persecution comes from those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ. But this has been the pattern throughout history:

*“The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses.
The church of the kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets.
The church of Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Jesus.
The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints.
And the multitudes of today, in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarch’s and prophets, the apostles and martyrs.
And condemn the faithfulness of the few as stubborn and foolish.”*

-From the article “Alone” (Author Unknown). (Complete article on page 311)

The most painful opposition often comes from family and friends and those who were once part of our church community:

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20: 29-30).

So, do not be surprised if opposition comes from those who are professing Christians.

5. Persecution comes in various forms: physical, economic and verbal.

Jesus was crucified. Paul was beaten (2 Corinthians 12: 24-25). And many of our brothers and sisters in Christ overseas are being tortured, maimed, and put to death for their faith. In the United States, physical persecution is illegal, and so it comes in different forms: economic (denying job benefits, for example) or verbal (character defamation, false accusations, and slander).

*“To be right with
God has often
meant to be in
trouble with men.”*

-A.W. Tozer

As to verbal persecution, websites are being used more and more in order to defame individual Christian leaders. In particular, we need to be wary of allegations made on anonymous blogs where the truth of the statement cannot be adequately examined. We must not be naïve about this verbal opposition that Christians are suffering in this Internet age.

Verbal persecution could include:

- *False Reports:* “Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me” (Matthew 5:11). (See also Psalm 38:12; 1 Kings 21:10; Ezra 4:12-13; Psalm 35:11; Jeremiah 20:10; Amos 7:10; John 7:12; Acts 6:11; 21:21, 28; 24:5.)
- *Threats:* “Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building” (Ezra 4:4). (See also Daniel 3:15; John 9:22; Acts 4:17.)
- *Ridicule:* “When we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now” (1 Corinthians 4:13). (See also Nehemiah 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:13; Revelation 2:9.)
- *Ostracism:* “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue; but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God” (John 16:2). (See also Matthew 10:22; John 9:29, 34; 12:42.)

“God had a Son that had no fault, but He never had a son that was not found fault with. God Himself was slandered in paradise by Satan. Let us not expect, therefore, to escape from the venomous tongue.”

-Charles Spurgeon

6. There are many promises and blessings associated with persecution. As believers there are many motivations for continuing in faith when persecuted:

- *God gives us grace to endure:* “What persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me” (2 Timothy 3:11)! (Also see Lamentations 3:22-23; Psalm 18:17-19; Nahum 1:7-8; Romans 8:18, 35-39; Hebrews 13:6; Revelation 3:10.)
- *God promises to be with us:* “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). (See also Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 43:2, 5; Matthew 28:20; 2 Corinthians 4:9.)
- *God promises the future triumph of Jesus Christ:* “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:25). (See also Obadiah 21; Philippians 3:20-21; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8; Revelation 11:15.)
- *God promises to judge righteously in the future:* “And while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23). (See also 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Jude 24; Ezra 6:8; Esther 6:11-13; Psalm 126:1; Daniel 6:26, 27; Haggai 2:22-23; Revelation 2:10; 7:13-17; 12:11.)
- *We are partakers in the suffering of Jesus:* “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). (See also 1 Peter 2:20-23; 1 Peter 3:14-17; 1 Peter 4:13-14.)

- *Because of all these wonderful promises we are to rejoice when persecution occurs: “But to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:13). (See also Romans 5:3-5; Psalm 30:5; Matthew 5:11-12; Acts 5:41; 16:22-25; Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 1:6, 8.)*

7. Christians are to respond to persecution with humility, rejoicing and love.

A common temptation when persecuted is to fret. But God wants us to take refuge in Him during trying times:

“Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (1 Peter 4:19).

“And we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure;” (1 Corinthians 4:12).

“O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me,” (Psalm 7:1).

“All Your commandments are faithful; they have persecuted me with a lie; help me!” (Psalm 119:86).

God uses persecution as a way to keep us humble---and humility is the path for future grace: *“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’ Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12: 9-10).*

God may want to use persecution to teach or discipline a person, leaders, or even an entire church. When opposition arises, humble people will ask themselves, “What is God trying to teach me?” Before we dismiss criticism too quickly as unfair or view it as a sign that we are living a godly life (2 Timothy 3:12), humble people seek God and examine themselves. There may be truth in the midst of poorly communicated criticism, even if it comes from people with malicious hearts. David’s response to Shimei (2 Samuel 16:5-13) is a good model to us:

“If he curses, and if the Lord has told him, ‘Curse David,’ then who shall say, ‘Why have you done so’” (2 Samuel 16:10)?

If we are humble, we will respond to persecution in two ways. First, like Jesus commands in Matthew 5:11-12, we will rejoice when persecuted: *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

“...but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Peter 4:13).

Second, when persecuted, we will love, bless and pray for our opponents:

“But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28).

“It was a deal; we preached and they [the communists] beat us. We were happy preaching. They were happy beating us, so everyone was happy.”

-Richard Wurmbbrand

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Romans 12:14).

Have you heard the story of Dirk Willems? In 16th century Holland Willems, an Anabaptist, was jailed for being “re-baptized” and for holding Christian meetings in his home. He escaped from jail and was pursued by an officer across a pond of ice. The pursuer was a heavy man, whose weight cracked the ice. He fell into the water and began to drown. Willems turned around and saw his pursuer’s predicament. Before he fell in the water the officer was a “wolf” to Willems. Now he viewed him as a “lost sheep.” Willems came back and pulled the officer out of the pond, saving his life. Willems was then escorted back to jail and later burned at the stake. Dirk Willems stands as a shining example of a Christian who loved the man who persecuted him. In so doing, Willems glorified God through his life:

“But if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name” (1 Peter 4:16).

8. Opposition may be a sign of mature spiritual leadership.

When experiencing opposition, a pastor may be tempted to think he is doing something wrong. But opposition may indicate that a pastor is doing something right—that he is a worthy follower of Jesus Christ. Note the example of the apostles in the first century:

“...And after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:40-41).

Also, a stunning verse is found in Acts 28:22. Paul was approached by some Jews who said this about the Christians: *“But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.”*

Can you imagine if your church or ministry was “*spoken against everywhere*”? Yet this is what Paul experienced. And we know that Paul was in the center of God’s will. This example shows that criticisms do not necessarily indicate that a pastor’s ministry is flawed. Criticisms may indicate that a pastor’s ministry is on target.

A legitimate question is asked: How can we know if a criticism of a pastor is valid or invalid? Here is my answer: I assume that a criticism is invalid unless it has been established by the testimony of two or three witnesses, in a just process. This would normally involve the pastor submitting to other pastors or godly Christian leaders who provide him accountability (1 Timothy 5:19-21). Therefore, when I see a pastor being criticized I look at these three factors:

Factor #1: Accountability structure: Is there is an accountability process in place to address valid criticisms of a pastor--a process based on the Scriptures? (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Timothy 5: 19-21). For example, in Great Commission Churches, a member with a concern can go through this appeal process: Meet one on one with the pastor; then with one or two other pastors; then with the church board; then with a Great Commission Churches representative. The purpose of this process is to discern whether or not the criticism is legitimate and to bring correction if needed.

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

-Tertullian

“Wicked men seem to bear great reverence to the saints departed; they canonize dead saints, but persecute living.”

-Thomas Watson

Factor #2: Humility of the pastor: Is the pastor’s response to the criticism one of humility? Does he ask God and men, “Is there some way that I am not being obedient to Jesus Christ?” In particular, does the pastor demonstrate humility by submitting himself to the church’s accountability process?

Factor #3: The willingness of the critic to work through the accountability structure: If the critic is aware of the accountability process, is he or she willing to submit his or her concerns to that process? Or does the critic choose instead to defame the character of the pastor through private or public communications (such as blogs)?

Honorable people with valid concerns will pursue an honorable process. But if a pastor is submitted to his church accountability process and his critic ignores that process, it raises serious questions about that critic, not the pastor. The legitimacy of the criticism is especially in question if the critic ignores the established accountability process and instead spreads negative characterizations of that pastor, one-on-one or through blogs.

So, if you are being opposed in ministry, maintain humility and faith. Humble yourself before God and be accountable to your church. And maintain faith in God and in the ministry He has given you. While a specific criticism may be valid and require correction on your part, other criticisms may actually indicate that you are doing something right—particularly if you are humble and accountable to God and men.

9. When a Christian is being persecuted, our responsibility as fellow followers of Christ is to quickly support and identify with that Christian.

How are we to respond when fellow Christians are opposed?

We must recognize that it is a temptation for us to “hope” that Christians will live the “pain-free” Christian life. So, when Christians are persecuted, particularly those in America, we will be tempted to be apathetic or even judgmental of those who are suffering for their faith. We might think, “If that Christian had been wiser or more sensitive or more kind he would have not have been opposed.” But we must remember that no one was wiser and more sensitive and kinder than Jesus Christ. Our Lord healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and fed the multitudes...and they still crucified Him. As churches we are to be a blessing to our communities through service projects that we do. But God forbid that we do so under the false thinking that it will guarantee us protection from persecution.

So, when Christians are persecuted for being bold in their faith, it is imperative that we reject a judgmental spirit and respond in humility, by supporting them for their courage. At the end of his life, Paul was suffering for the cause of Christ. Phygelus and Hermogenes turned away from the apostle, while Onesiphorus and his household supported Paul (2 Timothy 1:15, 16). In light of this, Paul urges Timothy: “*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God*” (2 Timothy 1:8).

May we all follow this example and strengthen our brothers when they are persecuted—verbally or otherwise. As we support and strengthen our fellow Christians we play a key role in advancing the gospel.

10. How can pastors prepare churches for persecution?

First Step: Self-Examination. Spend time before God in the word, examining your own life in regards to the teachings in the Scriptures on persecution. If you have not suffered or very seldom suffered from some form of opposition, is there some way that you are not living a life that is godly in Christ Jesus? If you are being criticized, are you learning what God wants to teach you? If you are being persecuted, are you responding with humility, joy and love?

Second Step: Support those who are being persecuted. It is vital that we come to the aid of those who are being persecuted, whether they are in our own church, in Great Commission Churches, or in the body of Christ at large. I encourage you to support the persecuted church through ministries such as Voice of the Martyrs. Also consider joining with other churches to promote the November International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church.

Third Step: Teach and equip the church. Jesus warned and equipped His disciples that they would be persecuted. So did Paul and Peter. We are to do the same through our public teaching and our one-on-one pastoring. Also, encouraging members to read the biographies of heroes of the faith will equip members for persecution.

Fourth Step: Build families, small groups and house churches. It has been pointed out that house churches are more able to withstand persecution. It is a wise strategy to build strong communities (be it a family, small group or a house church) where Christians support each other—spiritually, relationally and economically—should persecution arise.

Fifth Step: Build Alliances. Pastors are wise to build alliances with other churches and other Christians, not only because this honors the Lord but also because of the mutual support that can be provided in the case of persecution. (This is one reason I personally see GCC's involvement with the National Association of Evangelicals to be important as America becomes increasingly hostile to the faith.) Start by strengthening your relationship with the other GCC churches in your city and your region. In addition, work closely with evangelical ministeriums hosted in your city.

Sixth Step: Serve the community in the name of Christ. Blessing unbelievers in your city through serving the poor and helping the needy should be done with the motive of loving God and loving people. However, these acts of kindness may help to protect churches against false accusation and persecution in days to come.

Seventh Step: Be prepared legally. Get connected to Christian attorneys who can defend you, should persecution arise.

Eighth Step: Just Sow It! Continue to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Do not allow the threat of persecution to hinder the advancement of the gospel.

May God grant you and your church grace to love and obey God amidst persecution, and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth.

"If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed ... In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal."

-George Whitefield



PERSECUTION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

Addendum

ALONE

(Author Unknown)

It is human to stand with a crowd, it is divine to stand-alone. It is man-like to follow the people, to drift with the tide; it is God-like to follow a principle, to stem the tide,

It is natural to compromise conscience and follow the social and religious fashion for the sake of gain or pleasure; it is divine to sacrifice both on the altar of truth and duty.

"No man stood with me, but all forsook me," wrote the battle-scarred apostle in describing his first appearance before Nero to answer for his life for believing and teaching contrary to the roman world.

Truth has been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fadeless light for a garment of faded leaves.

Noah built and voyaged alone. His neighbors laughed at his strangeness and perished in style. Abraham wandered and worshipped alone. Sodomites smiled at the simple shepherd, followed the fashion, and fed the flames. Daniel dined and prayed alone.

Elijah sacrificed and witnessed alone. Jeremiah prophesied and wept alone.

Jesus loved and died alone.

Of the lonely way His disciples would walk, He said, "Straight is the gate and narrow the way which leads unto life and few there be that find it."

Of their treatment by the many who walk in the broad way, He said, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own; but because you are not of the world, therefore the world hates you for My Names-sake."

The church in the wilderness praised Abraham and persecuted Moses.

The church of the kings praised Moses and persecuted the prophets.

The church of Caiaphas praised the prophets and persecuted Jesus.

The church of the popes praised the Savior and persecuted the saints. And the multitudes of today, in the church and in the world, applaud the courage of the patriarch's and prophets, the apostles and martyrs. And condemn the faithfulness of the few as stubborn and foolish.

Wanted Today! Men, women, young and old, who will obey their convictions of the Truth and Duty at the Cost of fortune, and friends and life itself.



PERSECUTION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

Exercise

1. What was the main lesson you learned from this reading?

2. Describe a time in your life when you were reviled or persecuted because of your faith. What was your response?

3. Consider this sentence in the introduction: “However, we must be prepared to be opposed in whatever form it comes, particularly in light of the increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States in recent years.” Do you think that this statement is true; that there is increased hostility towards Christianity in the United States? Why or why not?



PERSECUTION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION CHRISTIAN

Exercise

4. Describe a time when someone you know was criticized or persecuted for his or her faith. How did you support that person?

5. What steps is your church taking to prepare for persecution? What are some other steps that can be taken?
