

WHAT IS PERSECUTION?

Sunday, July 6, 2025 -- 1 PETER series -- msg 4 -- Pastor Andrew Coleman

1 PETER references PERSECUTION

English Standard Version (ESV)

1 PETER 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

*To those who are **elect exiles** of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:*

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

1 PETER 1:6-7

***6** In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

1 PETER 2:19-21

***19** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. **20** For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. **21** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*

1 PETER 3:13-17

***13** Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? **14** But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, **15** but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, **16** having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. **17** For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*

1 PETER 4:12-16

***12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

1 PETER 5:9-10

***9** Resist him [the devil], firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. **10** And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PERSECUTION?

1. SOCIAL REJECTION & MARGINALIZATION:

Exclusion from normal social life or opportunities because of one's faith.

JOHN CHAPTER 9 – The man born blind. His parents' fear, his boldness and Jesus' pursuit!

vs 22 *"His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue."*

vs 34 *"And they [Jewish leaders] cast him out."*

- *England, 17th Century*: **Puritan Christians** were marginalized and driven out of mainstream society due to nonconformity with the Church of England.
- *Soviet Union, 20th Century*: **Soviet Believers** were denied university admission, professional advancement, and mocked for faith in atheistic society.

2. VERBAL HARASSMENT & SLANDER:

Insults, ridicule, or public defamation of believers.

MATTHEW 5:11 Jesus begins Sermon on the Mount

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

Jesus warned His disciples of verbal attacks and false accusations.

The JEWISH RELIGIOUS & POLITICAL LEADERS repeatedly accused the disciples...

- of breaking the law
MATTHEW 12:2 *"But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, 'Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.'"*
- of blasphemy
ACTS 7 -- Stephen's speech before his Jewish religious leader accusers
- of being drunk
ACTS 2:13 -- at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on them
- of disturbing the peace and inciting riots
Acts 16:20-21 Paul and Silas were accused of riling up the people against Rome
Acts 17:6-7 *"These men... have turned the world upside down... acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."*
- of desecrating the Temple
ACTS 21:28 Paul was falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the inner courts of the Temple.
- of being insane
ACTS 26:24 *Festus said with a loud voice, 'Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.'"*

The ROMANS commonly called the early Christians...

- atheists because they didn't believe in the Greco-Roman gods.
- cannibals because they misunderstood the Lord's Supper
(At the Last Supper Jesus said, *'This is my body, take eat. This is my blood, drink it...'*)

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PERSECUTION? *continued*

Romans called early Christians... *continued*

- **incestuous** because they called one another brother and sister and greeted one another with a *holy kiss* Romans 16:16.
"They say that Christians meet secretly and commit incest..." — Minucius Felix, Octavius
- **disloyal and treasonous** because they refused to offer incense to the emperor or participate in the civic pagan rituals.
- **economic saboteurs** because they refused to buy idols or attend pagan festivals.
Acts 19 -- Demetrius the silversmith stirred up a riot, accusing Paul of hurting the idol-making industry.

Verbal harassment and slander is prominently seen even **today** all around the world. Christians are often called 'haters' or 'phobic' or 'narrow minded' simply because of their alignment with God and biblical values on human sexuality or the exclusivity of salvation through Jesus Christ alone.

3. **LEGAL DISCRIMINATION:**

This is laws or policies that target believers for punishment or restriction.

A law was crafted specifically to trap Daniel for his faithfulness to God.

DANIEL 6:7 *"All the high officials of the kingdom... are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance... that whoever makes petition to any god or man besides you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions."*

- *Japan, 17th Century:* Christianity was outlawed; believers were forced to trample crosses or be exiled or executed.
- *China, 21st Century:* House churches declared illegal; worship leaders fined or imprisoned for unregistered religious activity. Church buildings confiscated and imploded. Missionaries ejected.
- *Algeria, 2017 - present:* All protestant churches ordered to close. Leaders fined, beaten, jailed and disappeared.

4. **ECONOMIC OPPRESSION:**

This is the denial of employment, trade, or resources due to faith.

Early believers had their possessions taken because of their Christian faith.

HEBREWS 10:34 *"You joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one."*

- *Nazi Germany, 1930s:* Confessing Church pastors were denied wages and pensions; congregations defunded.
- *India, 2000s:* Christian converts lose access to jobs and benefits in Hindu-dominant villages.

5. **PHYSICAL INTIMIDATION & VIOLENCE:**

This is physical assaults, mob violence, or intimidation.

Paul was stoned and left for dead for preaching the gospel.

ACTS 14:19 *"But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead."*

- *Nigeria, 21st Century:* Militant attacks on Christian villages by Boko Haram and Fulani extremists.
- *Indonesia, 1999:* Riots and arson attacks on Christian homes and churches in Ambon.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF PERSECUTION? *continued*

6. IMPRISONMENT & TORTURE:

Arrest, incarceration, or physical abuse for faith.

Paul and Silas were beaten and jailed in Philippi.

ACTS 16:23–24 *"And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison... fastened their feet in the stocks."*

- *Soviet Union, 20th Century:* Christians imprisoned in gulags; tortured for refusal to renounce Christ.
- *Iran, Present Day:* House church pastors detained, interrogated, and beaten for preaching.

7. MURDER & EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS:

Unlawful or mob-driven executions of believers.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was killed by a mob for proclaiming Christ.

ACTS 7:58–60 *"They cast him out of the city and stoned him... And Saul approved of his execution."*

- *Egypt, 2017:* 29 Coptic Christians killed in a bus ambush while traveling to a monastery.
- *Libya, 2015:* ISIS publicly beheaded 21 Coptic Christians on the beach for refusing to renounce Christ.

8. GENOCIDE & ETHNIC CLEANSING:

This is the systematic extermination of a faith group.

Pharaoh ordered the genocide of Hebrew male infants, targeting God's covenant people.

EXODUS 1:16, 22 *"If it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live... Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile."*

- *Armenian Genocide, 1915–1917:* Over 1 million Armenian Christians exterminated by the Ottoman Empire.
- *Iraq/Syria, 2014–2017:* ISIS systematically exterminated and expelled Christians from Mosul and Nineveh Plains.

SO HOW SHOULD WE THINK AND FEEL ABOUT PERSECUTION?

VICTIMIZATION? FEAR? SELF-EXALTATION? RETALIATION? CONDEMNATION? **NO!**

We lift our eyes UP to the GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD (*through* the suffering of the Cross).

HEBREWS 11: 23-40

23 By faith **Moses**, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 **He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.** 28 By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. 29 By faith **the people crossed the Red Sea...** 30 By faith **the walls of Jericho fell** down... 31 By faith **Rahab** the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient... 32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of **Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets**— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 39 **And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.**