



# Overview

**THE  
CHRISTIAN  
AND  
PERSECUTION**



## The Christian and Persecution – Overview

	Title	Issue	Sub Points	Summary
1	<b>Religious persecution – historical and global perspectives</b>	This is not just my problem! Religious persecution is a long-standing phenomenon of injustice, with numerous expressions across time, geography, diverse cultural and political contexts and affecting a wide range of religious traditions.	1) Defining religious freedom	<i>Most countries have committed to safeguarding freedom of religion or belief. There are well-established broad definitions in international law as to what religious freedom includes.</i>
			2) Global trends in religious persecution	<i>Most people live in countries in which religious freedom is not respected – principally through state restrictions or because of social hostilities.</i>
			3) The causes of religious persecution	<i>The causes of religious persecution are many, and these may vary from context to context – from ethno-religious nationalism to personal grievance and desire to benefit.</i>
			4) Biblical reflection on the causes of persecution	<i>The cross is just one reason among many that triggered persecution in the New Testament – persecution was also sometimes the result of cultural misunderstandings or suspicion based on nationalist sentiment. It is important to distinguish between suffering for Christ's sake from other reasons for suffering.</i>
			5) Persecution is a historical reality	<i>Christ and his church have been experiencing persecution since the earliest days of the church – it is not a new phenomenon!</i>
		Additional Reading	Ziya Meral, 'What are the Current Trends in Practice Regarding Article 18?' In: <i>Article 18: An Orphaned Right – a Report of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom</i> , Westminster, 2013.	
2	<b>Theological perspectives on persecution</b>	The reality of suffering presents deep questions that require detailed theological reflection about the place of suffering within the purposes of God.	1) Does God work for the 'good' of those who love him?	<i>The 'good' described in Romans 8:28 is often misunderstood. Our calling is according to his purpose, which is that we be conformed to the likeness of his son, the suffering servant.</i>
			2) Persecution as the voice of God	<i>Through identifying with the Son of God in his suffering, the Church participates in the work of the Son of God – to bring life to the world and glory to God.</i>

			3) Hope in the risen Lord Jesus	<i>As much as we participate in the sufferings of Christ, we also share in the resurrection, glory and honour of the Son of God.</i>
			4) Persecution and the body of Christ	<i>Jesus confronts and can gently restore to himself those who have denied him. Restoration back into the community of believers is often a far greater challenge!</i>
		Additional Reading	Ton, Josef: <i>Suffering and Martyrdom: A defining and essential Christian characteristic</i> , in Sauer, Christof & Howell, Richard (Eds): <i>Suffering, Persecution and Martyrdom; Theological Reflections</i> . Johannesburg: AcadSa, 2010	
3	<b>Biblical responses to persecution</b>	We see a range of valid responses to persecution in Scripture; the Holy Spirit's guidance is needed to discern which is appropriate in each situation.	1) Accepting and enduring persecution – even with joy?	<i>The Christian who has surrendered all to Christ, overcoming fear by his power, can accept and endure persecution for his sake, in his strength.</i>
			2) Escape routes – fleeing from persecution	<i>Biblical examples of escaping from persecution include Jesus and Paul. This can be a valid option today – not motivated by a concern for personal safety, but by a desire to further the work of God's kingdom, under his direction. Rather than asylum, temporary and local relocation options are usually the most effective.</i>
			3) Resisting and challenging persecution, for example by claiming our rights	<i>Using public opinion or appealing to legal rights can be a valid response to certain types of persecution. Claiming our rights can be a powerful testimony and can lead to greater protections for other believers – though the opposite can also apply, so great wisdom is needed.</i>
		Additional Reading	Religious Liberty Partnership: (a) <i>Relocation as a Response to Persecution: Policy and Commitment</i> (2013), (b) <i>Paper on Relocation by the Working Group on Support for Believers from Muslim Backgrounds</i> (2010).	
4	<b>Biblical principles for standing strong</b>	God does not promise to spare his people from persecution – rather, we are told to expect it. However, God does equip his people, strengthening them to stand firm when persecution comes.	1) Worldview and the promise of persecution	<i>Our culture's attitudes to suffering can influence our assumptions about Biblical teaching on persecution.</i>
			2) Understanding the reasons for attack	<i>In Scripture and in present-day experience, persecution came because of believers' connection with and testimony about Jesus, the exposing light of Jesus and the integrity of believers' witness for Jesus.</i>
			3) Knowing your enemy	<i>Understanding 'the world and its ruler' enables us to develop effective strategies for countering the enemy's tactics</i>

			4) Knowing your identity	<i>While it is important for our identity to be in strong relationships with our earthly family, it is even more important to be connected with our new spiritual family and to draw our identity principally from that family.</i>
		Additional Reading	"The Call of Discipleship, the Call of the Cross" (excerpts): Penner, Glenn, <i>In the Shadow of the Cross; A Biblical Theology of Persecution and Discipleship</i> , Bartlesville, OK: Living Sacrifice Books, 2004	
5	<b>Theological approaches to human rights</b>	There is a strong biblical support for the concept of human rights, and a clear mandate for promoting and advocating for the human rights of all.	1) Human Rights in Christian Perspective	<i>The Creator endows humans with dignity; this Biblical rights concept, emerging in the Pentateuch, has been foundational in many subsequent expressions of human rights. The doctrines of God, man, sin, salvation, the Kingdom, ethics and government all underpin a Christian concern for upholding the rights of all people.</i>
			2) Countering Christian objections to human rights	<i>There are coherent biblical answers to objections against human rights advocacy which have sometimes come from some Christians circles.</i>
			3) The imperatives of justice and love	<i>A distinctly Christian concept of human rights must have as its core not just God's demand for justice but also Jesus' imperative of love, of which he is the exemplar.</i>
		Additional Reading	<i>Evangelism and Social Responsibility: an Evangelical Commitment</i> (Lausanne Occasional Paper 21): Chapters 3 and 4 ("A Call to Social Responsibility" and "The Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility")	
6	<b>Religious freedom in international and national law</b>	Most countries in the Middle East and North Africa have commitments under international law, and also within regional and national law, to prevent religious discrimination and to uphold freedom of religion. Even if not respected, these commitments provide a framework and language to challenge injustice.	1) What is religious freedom?	<i>The understanding of religious freedom within the modern rights concept has deep historical roots. A 'normative core' has emerged which includes the freedom to have a religion or belief, to change one's religion or belief, and to manifest one's religion or belief.</i>
			2) The challenge of religious freedom within Islamic contexts	<i>Significant challenges persist within Islamic contexts to the upholding in practice of religious freedom. Views amongst Muslim scholars vary widely from the denial of human rights as compatible with Islam to the opposite – and many points in between.</i>
			3) Responding to the challenge	<i>Believers have a variety of options for responding to religious injustice, through local action or through engagement with the international community.</i>

		Additional Reading	Stefanus Alliance International, <i>Freedom of religion or belief for everyone</i> : Oslo, 2012	
7	<b>Advocating for the rights of the persecuted</b>	There are a range of advocacy, publicity and support options which enable us to speak up for those persecuted for their faith.	1) Advocacy: what and why?	<i>As a biblical mandate, advocacy is action to rectify incident and systemic injustice.</i>
			2) Advocacy: processes	<i>The advocacy process consists of monitoring, documentation and actions stages, which must be followed carefully if advocacy is to be accurate and credible.</i>
			3) Advocacy targets	<i>There are local, regional and international mechanisms can be used in the advocacy effort; an advocacy campaign must identify and target those that are most likely to be able to bring about the desired outcomes.</i>
			4) Best practices in undertaking advocacy	<i>Authorisation, accuracy and the careful use of publicity are at the core of effective advocacy.</i>
		Additional Reading	Becker, Jo, <i>Campaigning for Justice: Human Rights Advocacy in Practice</i> . Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. Chapter 4: "Working with UN Special Rapporteurs to Promote Human Rights."	
8	<b>Pastoring and ministering to the persecuted</b>	Pastors and other Christian leaders in the Middle East and North Africa face the twin challenges of coping with particular persecution on account of their leadership position while at the same time nurturing and leading others who are persecuted.	1) Spiritual and emotional challenges faced by Christians under persecution	<i>Physical and material challenges are often most visible, but it is essential to recognise the spiritual and emotional challenges faced by those undergoing persecution, and to nurture and care with these needs in mind.</i>
			2) Common challenges faced by those who minister	<i>Leaders often face more intense pressures than those to whom they minister. The leader needs strategies for remaining strong – love and unity are key factors.</i>
			3) Assisting those who are persecuted	<i>Christians are called to offer spiritual and other practical encouragement and support to those who face persecution, thus bringing glory to God.</i>
		Additional Reading	Willard, Dallas, <i>The Great Omission</i> , San Francisco: Harper, 2006. Chapter 11: "Personal Soul Care For Ministers... And Others."	

9	<b>Caring and coping through Stress</b>	It is vital that Church communities provide effective care and support to those who are suffering because of previous or ongoing stressful situation, with an emphasis on addressing collective and not just individual needs. Church and ministry leaders should be equipped with care-giving and lay-counselling skills, and should understand the importance of looking after their own well-being as well as the well-being of others.	1) A biblical basis for emotional care	<i>The bible encourages us to express emotional stress and to listen to and care for those who have emotional and other needs.</i>
			2) Understanding stress	<i>Distress caused by critical incidents or complex stressors can be managed with proper care.</i>
			3) Caring for the distressed	<i>Active listening skills, and tools such as Egan's 'Skilled Helper Model,' can assist in redirecting the distressed towards productive thinking and action, fostering recovery.</i>
			4) The importance of self-care	<i>Those serving in compassionate ministries should recognise the need for reflection and the adoption of coping strategies in order to manage the secondary stress they inevitably face.</i>
		Additional Reading	Ajith Fernando: "Joy and Sacrifice in the Lord," in <i>Doing Member Care Well: Perspectives and Practices from Around the World</i> , Kelly O'Donnell (Ed), William Carey Library, Pasadena, 2002.	
10	<b>Learning from those who've endured</b>	Many Christians have suffered and endured persecution before us. Their stories can be an encouragement and an inspiration for those who suffer today.	1) A testimony from Russia	<i>God honours the witness of his faithful servant, protecting his faith amidst sustained persecution.</i>
			2) Strength to endure: personal characteristics	<i>There are several traits in personal faith and practice that are typically found in those who have endured intense persecution. Developing these traits should be a priority for other believers, especially where persecution is expected.</i>
			3) Strength to endure: characteristics of a supporting community	<i>In addition to personal faith and practice, a strong and supportive community of believers is vital if believers are to endure.</i>
		Additional Reading	Fernando, Ajith: <i>The Call to Joy and Pain: Embracing Suffering in Your Ministry</i> , Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007. Chapter 2 (A Forgotten Treasure) and Chapter 5 ("Faith and Endurance")	