

**PERSECUTION**  
2 Timothy 3:12  
By Raymond White

There are two kinds of problems that God seems to heap on believers: persecution specifically, and all others generally. But let's here focus on persecution, that particular kind of suffering that targets believers *because* they are believers.

***Psalms 44:22** For thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.*

***Acts 5:41** And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*

We should deem it an honor that God allows us the privilege to suffer for him. That of course is easier said than done, but it is reasonable. If you are going to suffer persecution, you might as well take some comfort that God notices and will in some way reward you for your stalwartness.

***Acts 14:22** ...we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*

This doesn't specifically say persecution, there are lots different kinds of tribulation that God asks Christians to endure: problems at home, problems on the job, problems everywhere. A Christian is to deal with all of them in a Christian like manner. For instance, poverty might entice us to rob a bank. But our Christianity forbids just that sort of thing.

***Romans 5:3** And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:*

***Romans 8:17** ...if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. **:18** For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

***Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...*

This is intended as solace, to comfort us with the thought that bad things are as good for us as good things. For believers, who gain heaven because they believe, they will one day see that they believed and gained heaven *because* of all the experiences of life, good and bad. Therefore, without the bad, they might have not believed and lost out on their eternal happiness. So be thankful for the bad as well as the good.

***2 Corinthians 4:10** Also bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

***Philippians 1:20** ...Christ shall be magnified in my body...*

Paul is referring to his own scars and visible injuries. They are his manifestation of Christ, the evidence that his gospel is genuine and Jesus truly is the Christ.

*Colossians 2:14 ...ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews:*

Greek non-believers persecute Greek Christians, just as Jewish non-believers persecute Jewish Christians. Persecution comes from everywhere.

*2 Timothy 3:12 Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

Now we have a disconnect. “All” who live godly will suffer persecution? Is that literally true? The problem is, I don’t feel particularly persecuted. I live in a free country, free to believe what I want and say what I want, so does that mean that I am not living godly? Maybe, or maybe not. Let’s think about this.

In the fourth century, Saint Anthony lived a deprived life intentionally and became the first monk. He wasn’t trying to create a movement, he was just trying to live a simple life and perhaps trying to escape the very real dangers of the 10<sup>th</sup> and final Roman persecution under Diocletian.

But a decade later, after Constantine had defeated Licinius, the 300 years of terror on Christians was over.

Well that solved a problem, and created a problem. For 300 years Christians vetted their Christianity by enduring the persecutions heaped against them. If they were tortured and killed then they were true Christians indeed.

But now what? Now that no one was chasing them, no lions to be fed to, no crosses to be hung on, what was a Christian to do to be convince himself that he was truly a Christian? What test of faith was there?

Answer: Saint Anthony and his austere life. If persecutions was no longer available to deprive Christians of a happy life, well then, Christians would just have to deprive themselves of that happy life anyway.

And so many Christians turned to Saint Anthony and to his monk-ish lifestyle to define themselves as Christians.

Here’s my question: Is all that really necessary? Does God demand that we make sacrifices even when no sacrifices are called for?

If persecution comes our way because we preach Christ we are to endure that and preach anyway. But if there are no such persecutions, then what? The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees to us freedom of religion. Are we to follow Saint Anthony’s example? Well, maybe. Here’s what I believe, you believe what you want.

### **[1] GOOD TIMES, BAD TIMES**

We are to preach Christ in every circumstance, and endure persecution if there is persecution to endure. If there is no persecution to endure, then count your blessings.

**2 Timothy 4:2** *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season...*

In other words, when it is convenient and safe, and when it is not convenient and safe. When it is safe, don't lament the absence of danger. That would be ridiculous.

## [2] REGULAR SACRIFICE

We should always be sacrificing anyway. Enduring persecution is not the only way to sacrifice. Enduring troubles is not the only way to sacrifice. Being a monk is not the only way to sacrifice. We sacrifice best by giving. Contributing to charities costs us something. Giving up our time to help the less fortunate or in trouble costs us something.

**James 1:27** *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions...*

A political irony here is that liberals who always demand that we do more for the poor are not the more generous among us. Conservatives are actually far more generous giving freely to those in need.

## [3] INJUSTICE

Issues of religion are not the only things God calls us to defend that might draw persecution. There is injustice. And when we are silent about injustice then we might as well be silent about religion.

**Proverbs 21:3** *To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.*

In other words, how you deal with justice is more important to God than how you deal with religion.

Demanding justice for the helpless, like for instance defending the unborn by opposing abortion openly, is as likely and maybe more likely to get you in trouble than anything you might say about religion. So maybe Paul was onto something — if you're not suffering some kind of persecution from somewhere, maybe you're not saying something that you should be saying.

## [4] TWO SIDES

Speaking of ironies, it is ironic that while God insists that we endure persecution, his clear wish for us is peace which is the exact opposite of persecution. And yet somehow the only way to peace is to endure the persecution. That is ironic. It is also true.

**John 14:27** *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

That's all.