Perspective

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Are You Prepared for Persecution?

There seems to be an uptick in incidents around the world of those suffering persecution among those who are called "Christians." In a recent case in Egypt, security officers tied a person, Said Mansour Rezk Abdelrazek, to a wall in the shape of a cross, and tried to strip a tattoo of a cross from his skin. They sent Muslim clerics to his cell to try to convince him to return to the worship of Allah. He refused to return to Islam. The Egyptian state asked a terrorism court for the maximum penalty, death or 25 years in prison, for a 30-year-old man whose crime, his lawyers say, is his refusal to renounce Jesus. Born into a Muslim family, Abdelrazek first encountered Christianity when he noticed an open Bible in a neighbor's shop. He reacted angrily to what he read, then kept thinking about it and returned days later to speak with a part-time minister. He went on to study the Bible at a Protestant Baptist church and was baptized around 2017. An estimated 388 million Christians now face high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith, up eight million from the previous year. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the deadliest region. 15 countries now register "extreme" persecution levels. In our time, such acts of persecution are not common in Western countries. They happen primarily in Muslim and Hindu nations. Hindu nationalists have been involved in the persecution of Christians in India. Reports indicate a significant increase in violence and discrimination against Christians, including physical attacks and legal restrictions on religious practices. Persecution is a common experience for followers of Christ, as the Bible teaches, and at times it has been intense in different parts of the world. It seems to be making a comeback. If it were to come our way, would we be ready for it?

Coming to America sooner than you think

Egypt's case is the sharp edge of a wider pattern. According to Humanists International, leaving Islam is a crime in 17 countries and punishable by death in 12 of them; every one of those countries is a Muslim-majority.

Wikipedia reports: "EPIC City is a master-planned Islamic community-centered residential development project in Texas, situated approximately 40 minutes from Dallas near the town of Josephine. The initiative spans 402 acres across unincorporated portions of Collin and Hunt counties, and was initiated by the East Plano Islamic Center (EPIC). Since its announcement in 2024, the project has generated both significant interest from potential residents and controversy from political figures and social media commentators."

The laws protecting Islam from its critics are moving to the United States and other countries of the West with their Sharia law. They want to build Islamic cities where Sharia law is enforced. Sharia law is the set of rules and guidelines followed by people who adhere to the Muslim faith. According to recent reports, a Collin County judge has issued a ruling that has "all but halted construction" of the project until at least November 2026. This decision came after Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton filed lawsuits and after the Oversight Project's investigation found potential violations of federal and state law. Ken Paxton's term runs out in January 2027, so things can change.

"Initially, Sharia law was applied discretely within the small Muslim enclaves of Europe. But after three generations of high birth rate and immigration into Europe, those enclaves have grown in size and number into "no go" zones (55 in Sweden alone) where Sharia law displaces civil law and has begun to challenge the Judeo-Christian foundation of their host European nations" (Sharia Law in Europe).

The incursion of Islamic practices will be a gradual thing, but what has happened in other countries, should serve as a warning to the United States. Today, Sharia law is taking root in Germany, Sweden and other European nations that threw open their doors to Muslim refugees; they are forming "Sharia Police" to patrol, impose and enforce Sharia law on their host nations' streets.

Enduring persecution is a part of our calling

The very idea of beheadings instantly causes most to think of practices within Muslim countries. We likewise think of the references in the Bible. Beheading appears in both the Old and New Testaments as a method of execution or a symbol of military victory, persecution, or martyrdom. The Bible records several beheadings, including Goliath, King Saul (1 Samuel 31:9), John the Baptist (Matthew 14:10, and unnamed martyrs in Revelation 20:4.

Revelation 20:4 focuses on the martyrdom of saints who refuse to worship the beast or his image, and would not take his mark. In the tenth Beatitude, a part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:10 says, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

In His farewell discourse Jesus warned His disciples: *"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also."* (John 15:20)

The followers of Christ are admonished to endure persecution with faith and trust in God, knowing they will be rewarded in the kingdom. The Bible also teaches that those who persecute God's people will be held accountable by God. Ultimately, persecution is a test of our faith and an opportunity to glorify God through suffering like Jesus Christ. Acts 5:41 explicitly states that after being arrested, beaten, and released, the apostles went out, "*...rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name."*

The apostle Paul exhorted and warned young Timothy that by living a righteous life in Christ he would inevitably face opposition from this world: *"Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution"* (II Timothy 3:12).

Enduring persecution is our path to glory

We certainly shouldn't seek persecution, but if it comes our way, our attitude as the disciples of Christ is to rejoice that we could be counted worthy to suffer for His name's sake. Romans 8:35 teaches us the greatness of God's love for us: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"*

Jesus warned the disciples in His farewell instructions, Matthew 10:22: *"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved."*

In His fourth Beatitude, Luke 6:22, Jesus admonished them, *"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake."*

When the apostles Barnabas and Paul had preached the gospel in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch after being persecuted and even stoned in Lystra, they returned to these same cities to encourage and strengthen the new believers. The "strengthening" here refers to affirming their faith, reinforcing their understanding of the gospel, and preparing them for ongoing challenges and trials (Acts 14:22).

Paul summed up the life a true follower of Christ: *"And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now."* (I Corinthians 4:12-13)

Persecution can come through oppression. When persecution occurs, justice is often denied to the victims. It can be by physical, mental, or emotional torment. The Bible talks about the suffering of the righteous and how they are often persecuted for their faith.

Enduring to the end to reap the rewards

Why must we endure hardships and trials in life? Romans 8:16-17 gives us the answer: *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."*

Paul wrote the church at Philippi, *"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me."* (Philippians 1:29-30)

We want to be like Jesus Christ—made in His image. The apostle John writes, *"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."* (I John 3:2)

We will be in the glorified form like our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ --- Whose face shines like the sun. We don't know exactly what we shall be, but we know we'll be like Christ because we will be able to look on Him. Exodus 33:20 says, *"But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.'"*

The apostle Peter instructed the church not to be surprised when trials and sufferings come: "but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (I Peter 4:13)

Our gladness and exceeding joy will come when we will be glorified like Our Lord and Savior! And we will see Him as He is!