

# Christian Suffering

**And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.** (II Timothy 3:12)<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The perception among many Christians and Christian organizations today is that Christianity is under attack and that Christians must do everything in their power to fight back or else lose their right to exercise their faith. Do you think that Christians are being persecuted in America? Do you feel that Christian morals are being challenged and that this country must return to its Christian roots? Does it frustrate or even anger you when you hear that monuments to the *Ten Commandments* are ordered to be removed from public places, or that students are not allowed to pray in public schools, or that God is left out of the classroom, or that “Christ” is removed from Christmas? What about causes carried out in the name of God that receive resistance? Do you want those people or organizations who undermine Christianity or godly principles to be brought to justice through our courts? What does Scripture say about Christian suffering and persecution?

I use the term *Christian rights* throughout this study because many Christians in America are convinced that their rights as children of God are being infringed upon. As you read this study, please consider the following points:

- We are saved from the consequences of our sins by believing the gospel of salvation, which is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised up from the dead (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 3:21-26).
- Salvation is by the undeserved grace of God—it is through belief in the gospel of salvation apart from any works of righteousness (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 4:4-5; 10:8-10).
- Prior to salvation we are spiritually dead in our sins and members of this evil world—we are children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3; Galatians 1:3-5).
- Upon believing the gospel of salvation we become members of the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27; Galatians 3:26-28). God considers us to be His children in Christ at His own right hand and citizens of heaven (Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 3:1; Philippians 3:20-21). That is, God called us out of this world and into His realm (John 15:19; 18:36).

According to these truths of God, although we continue to be in this world, we are not of it. Therefore, how can we claim to have rights as Christians? How can we expect the unbelieving world and its system to recognize what we have in Christ? I believe that we can't. Furthermore, I don't believe that God wants us to work with or against the worldly system in the hope of preventing suffering for Christ. I will try to substantiate my position in this study through an examination of Scripture.

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<sup>1</sup> All references are quoted from the *New American Standard Bible* (1973 Reference Edition). Words in brackets are either equivalent words from the *King James Version* or, if in italics, were added by me for clarification.

## Suffering for Christ

What does it mean to suffer for Christ? If we feel we are being persecuted, we should be sure in our minds why we are being persecuted, and our response to the persecution should be appropriate in God's eyes. We are instructed in Scripture about how God views persecution and suffering and how we should respond to it.

**Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me [Christ]. (Matthew 5:11)**

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

**And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (II Timothy 3:12)**

**The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we [believers] are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (Romans 8:16-18)**

**By no means let any of you [believers] suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not feel ashamed, but in that name let him glorify God. (I Peter 4:15-16)**

**And not only this, but we [believers] also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)**

**To this present hour we [Paul and his coworkers] are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; 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. (I Corinthians 4:11-13)**

**For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours [Paul and his coworkers] in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort. (II Corinthians 1:5-7)**

**Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I [Paul] come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me. (Philippians 1:27-30)**

**Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” “But if your enemy is hungry, feed Him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** (Romans 12:17-21)

As we face persecution or suffering in our lives because we are living for God and our Lord Jesus Christ, we need to be mindful of the verses listed above. The following truths can be gleaned from them:

- We will be persecuted if we live godly lives in Christ our Lord.
- It is a blessing to be persecuted for the sake of Christ.
- We are to bless those who persecute us.
- Our sufferings in this life do not compare to the glory in Christ that we will inherit.
- We are to be thankful for our tribulations and should glorify God as we live for Christ.
- We should try to soothe or gain the goodwill of, and perhaps even reconcile with, those who persecute us.
- If we suffer it should be for doing the right thing, and we should follow Christ’s example by enduring it with patience.
- If we suffer for the sake of Christ, we can also realize or experience our comfort in Christ.
- We should not be alarmed by our adversaries or seek retribution or revenge for our suffering; instead, we are to respond in kindness and leave judgment to God.

It is one thing to suffer for Christ; that is, to suffer for living as we ought to live in accordance with the word of God. It is quite another thing to suffer persecution, or perceived persecution, because of misguided intentions or because of our naïve or irresponsible behavior. For example, we should not suffer as a troublesome meddler, but as a Christian (I Peter 4:15-16). In other words, we should not bring unnecessary ridicule on ourselves, on God, or on our Lord Jesus Christ by misrepresenting God or His word in this godless world. We should examine our motives and not cause people to blaspheme God as the people of Israel consistently did (Romans 2:24). If we suffer, it should be for doing the right thing. The one who suffers for the right thing should glorify God, be thankful, and not complain or seek retribution.

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

Christ suffered greatly for us, not only to the point of death of the cross (Philippians 2:5-8) but by going to hell to pay the full price of our sin (total spiritual suffering—Ephesians 4:9-10; Romans 6:10). As much as He suffered physically, however, He left it to the faithful to suffer even more—to fill up what was lacking (Colossians 1:24). Besides our Lord, Scripture provides many examples of suffering in the name of God.

- Israel persecuted and killed the prophets sent by God (Acts 7:52).
- John the Baptist was bound, imprisoned, and beheaded (Matthew 14:3-10).
- Steven was stoned to death (Acts 7:58-60).
- Paul was whipped and beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and put to death (II Corinthians 11:24-25; II Timothy 4:6).

- Other faithful believers were ill-treated, left destitute, mocked, scourged, tortured, imprisoned, stoned, killed by the sword, and even sawn in two (Hebrews 11:35-38).

These people suffered greatly because they stood for God and proclaimed His word. Suffering and persecution were the outcome of living godly lives and fighting the good fight of faith. Even today, believers in some parts of the world suffer greatly, even death, for proclaiming the gospel of salvation or for no other reason than being known as a Christian (e.g., through worshiping with other believers or by not denying their faith). This type of persecution is not occurring in America. For this we should be thankful and not be so quick to complain. Or, perhaps, we should consider why we are not suffering for Christ. Are we living for Christ or are we conformed to this world?

### Perceived Persecution in America

As stated at the beginning of this study, many Christians, particularly those who consider themselves to be evangelical or conservative Christians, consider themselves to be under great persecution. They are convinced that our Christian rights are being undermined through laws and the efforts of non-Christian organizations. Is this really happening? Let's look at some examples and examine what Scripture has to say about them.

#### National Repentance

A common belief among Christians today is that Christianity is under attack in America because of its decline into sin. Many brethren have the sincere desire for America to turn back to God so that we can receive and enjoy the blessings of God as promised in Scripture. However, all references in the Bible regarding national repentance and blessings are addressed to the nation of Israel. It was Israel that God raised up to be a nation for Himself because of the sinfulness of all the other nations (Deuteronomy 14:2; 18:9-14; 26:18-19). Most of the Bible is addressed to Israel and God's purpose and plan for that nation. Because of their continued disobedience, however, God blinded (hardened) Israel and set it aside as a favored nation until the fulness of the Gentiles has come (Romans 10:1-3; 11:25-32; II Corinthians 3:14-15). It is a temporary blindness, therefore, but one that continues to this day and won't end until sometime after the rapture.<sup>2</sup>

In this dispensation of grace (Ephesians 3:1-11), all believers are members of the body of Christ. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, male and female, or slave and free people (I Corinthians 12:12-13; Galatians 3:26-28). Furthermore, God has no favored nation at this time—not the State of Israel, not America, not any country. Nor is America *spiritual Israel* as some teach. Brethren, it is a misuse of Scripture to claim God's promises to Israel as our own (II Timothy 2:15).

The desire for America to *turn back to God* is a misconception. Neither America, nor any other nation, is a Christian nation or was founded on Christianity or the laws of God.<sup>3</sup> The good laws that are in place—those that reflect the goodness or principles of God—in this and *all* other countries exist because

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<sup>2</sup> See my study **The Mystery (God's Secret Plan)** for an explanation of God's eternal plan and purpose through the ages.

<sup>3</sup> Most, if not all, of America's founding fathers were Masons. Freemasonry is a religion that worships a god of their imagination (the god of all religions) and not the Almighty God, the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

God is sovereign and is working out His will through vessels of honor *and* dishonor (Romans 9:14-24). Does God really want us to try to moralize our sinful nation or the world? No. How can a person or a nation endeavor to obey God without first knowing Christ as Savior?

- The natural man cannot understand the things of God (I Corinthians 2:14).
- The natural man cannot please God (Romans 8:6-8).
- The natural man does not seek after God (Romans 3:10-11).
- The fruit of the flesh (natural man) is everything contrary to God (Galatians 5:19-21).

We can't expect people to become morally upright without first being saved (no one will become sinless, however). The first thing Paul told the Corinthians was the gospel of salvation (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Only *after* salvation can we learn how to live for God and our Lord Jesus Christ and be able to do so. No nation is righteous or morally upright—nor has there ever been such a nation. Only when Israel is redeemed (which will occur sometime after the rapture) will there be a righteous nation, and that is because God will spiritually change the people of Israel and write His Law on their hearts (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31: 31-33). No such promise was made to any other nation, nor can it be spiritually applied to any other nation. America will never be obedient to God.

## Political Authority

In association with the previous section, many Christians believe that the key to national repentance is voting in the right leadership. By doing so, it is thought that Christian persecution and the erosion of our Christian rights will subside or cease. In other words, the thinking is that God has left it up to us—made it our responsibility—to make sure the right people are in office. Please consider the following perspective.

**Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.** (Romans 13:1-2)

All those in authority, whether President, Governor, or Mayor, are in authority by the will of God—He uses them for His purpose (Romans 9:14-21; 13:1-7; Psalm 103:19; Proverbs 21:1; Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 4:35). Christians may think we have the responsibility and power to put *God's man* (or woman) in office, but what makes us more politically influential in accomplishing the will of God than believers who live in non-democratic countries, whose leaders are also in power by the will of God? We must be careful who we support and why, because God may have planned to place our choice in authority for the purpose of dishonorable use or as a vessel of wrath (Romans 9:21-22; Proverbs 16:4). For whoever God places in authority, we are to render all that is due them (Romans 13:7).<sup>4</sup>

## The Ten Commandments

Successful civil lawsuits have forced the removal of monuments to the *Ten Commandments* from public buildings across the country. Many Christians cry *Persecution!* at such occurrences. Is this really an act or symbol of persecution? Brethren, does God really want us to obey the *Ten Commandments*

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<sup>4</sup> See my study **Governing Authority** that addresses how God wants us to respond to our political leadership.

and force obedience of them on our country or the world (Exodus 20:3-17)? If we understand to some degree the gospel of the grace of God, we should know the following truths:

- The penalty for breaking four of the ten commandments was death. These are breaking the Sabbath requirements (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:15); striking or cursing your mother or father (Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17); murder (Exodus 20:13; 21:12); and adultery (Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 20:10). Bearing false witness and coveting could also result in death (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 19:18-21).
- The Law killed us (spiritually) because no one is righteous according to the Law (II Corinthians 3:6).
- If we try to keep part of the Law, we are under obligation to keep the whole Law (Galatians 3:10-14; 5:3).
- Thankfully, we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under grace—the Law was nailed to the cross with Christ (Acts 13:38-39; Romans 3:21-26; 6:14; Colossians 2:13-14).

Please consider that our federal laws incorporate only three of the ten commandments—only murder, stealing, and bearing false witness (in some cases) are subject to punishment, and only one (murder) can result in the death penalty. Furthermore, the right to freedom of religious expression directly contradicts the first four commandments. Brethren, the United States Constitution is not a holy or sacred document inspired by God.

Although we are not under the Law of Moses and subject to its associated penalties, the intent and purpose of nine of the ten commandments (excluding keeping the Sabbath) were true before the Law was instituted and continue to hold true for believers in this dispensation of grace. They are unchanging principles of God, and He expects His children to live accordingly.

- First commandment: You shall have no other gods before Me (Exodus 20:3). This principle applies to us (Galatians 4:8-9).
- Second commandment: You shall not make yourself an idol or worship idols (Exodus 20:4-6). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 8:4-6).
- Third commandment: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain (Exodus 20:7). This principle applies to us (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; Ephesians 4:29-30; 5:6; II Timothy 4:3-4).
- Fourth commandment: Keep the Sabbath day holy (Exodus 20:8-11). There are no Sabbath days or any other holy days, months, seasons, or years to observe in this dispensation of grace (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16-17).
- Fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother (Exodus 20:12). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 6:1-2).
- Sixth commandment: You shall not murder (Exodus 20:13). This principle applies to us (Romans 1:28-32).
- Seventh commandment: You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14). This principle applies to us (I Corinthians 6:9-10).
- Eighth commandment: You shall not steal (Exodus 20:15). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:28).
- Ninth commandment: You shall not bear false witness (Exodus 20:16). This principle applies to us (Ephesians 4:25, 31).

- Tenth commandment: You shall not covet (Exodus 20:17). This principle applies to us (Romans 13:8-9).

Whether monuments to the *Ten Commandments* are in public places or not should not be a concern to believers—their removal is not a symbol of Christian persecution. Actually, however, believers should *not* want to impose the *Ten Commandments* on anyone because God has taken the Law of Moses out of the way and replaced it with righteousness by faith in Christ’s work for us at the cross.

## Prayer in Schools

Christians decry the fact, and consider it to be persecution, that laws prevent prayer and Bible classes in public schools. Does God really want us to pray publicly in schools? Please consider all the religions in America and in the world. What is to stop anyone from praying to whomever or whatever he chooses? Our prayers are between us and God, and we should be careful to avoid the hypocritical appearance of praying in order to be seen by men, or demonstrating our *righteousness* (actually self-righteousness) before unsaved people.

**“And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order to be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”** (Matthew 6:5-6)

Because we are children of God and have the Holy Spirit, we can pray to God any time of the day and anywhere without drawing attention to ourselves. We can pray discreetly and silently (in our minds), without kneeling or bowing before God, or without even closing our eyes.<sup>5</sup> Brethren, laws against prayer in school, or even studying the Bible in school, should not be considered as a form of persecution. Instead, we should be thankful because the laws preventing these activities actually help prevent open blasphemy against God.

## Christmas (and Other Days)

“Merry Christmas” is often replaced by “Happy Holidays” or some other non-religious phrase to avoid being disrespectful to non-Christians. This change in greeting over the last few decades has been very upsetting to many Christians who consider it to be a form of persecution and an infringement on their right to celebrate Christmas according to the word of God. But is it?

Christmas is considered by many Christians to be one of the two most holy days of the year (the other being Easter). This study won’t go into the history of Christmas but, brethren, Christmas is not in the Bible. Nothing in Scripture tells us to celebrate the birth of Jesus—we don’t even know the date of His birth from Scripture. Unknown to most Christians, however, is that the Bible says *not* to celebrate Christmas as a spiritual holiday (which is derived from *holy day*), although not in those specific words.

Under the Law of Moses, there were many holy days, months, seasons, and years (e.g., Leviticus 23). All of the required observances (ordinances) were to help the people of Israel remember what God had done for them—they were integral and necessary parts of their worship of God. In fact, breaking any of

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<sup>5</sup> See my study **Prayer** for more information on how God wants us to pray.

the requirements associated with the Sabbath day was to be punished by death. However, we are no longer under the Law but under grace. Because we are no longer under the Law of Moses, there are no holy days, months, seasons, or years for us to observe or celebrate (Colossians 2:16-17).

**But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.** (Galatians 4:9-11)

Furthermore, spiritual celebrations and songs for the Christmas season often focus on Jesus as an infant (as well as promises directly related to Israel). First of all, when we celebrate someone's birthday, do we think of them as an infant or as the person they have become? More importantly, however, is that although we know and are thankful that Jesus was born into the human race and suffered as a man, we are no longer to know Him as a man of flesh. Instead, we are to know and live for Him as our resurrected and glorified Lord Jesus Christ.

**For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.** (II Corinthians 5:14-16)

This is not to say that it is wrong to celebrate Christmas in a secular sense. It is a time of family gatherings and exchanging of gifts and, especially as believers, we can experience comfort and joy when focusing on these positive aspects of Christmas. Unfortunately, the economic impacts of the season are often emphasized, and the exchanging of gifts can lead to, or result in, pride, coveting, disappointment, and financial debt. Sometimes the worst of family dynamics surface during this time. Furthermore, we should not sing praises to a tree.

Brethren, the same concept applies to the spiritual celebration of Easter—another *Christian* holiday with very unchristian roots. We are not told in Scripture to picture Jesus hanging on the cross, or to reenact the events leading up to His crucifixion, His crucifixion, or His resurrection. Only through our Lord's revelation to Paul regarding the *last supper* are we given a means to remind ourselves (although not on a specified date or frequency) of our sinful condition and what Christ accomplished for us at the cross (I Corinthians 11:20-34).<sup>6</sup> Our salvation, spiritual blessings, daily walk, and eternal hope are all centered on—and are the result of—our Lord's work at the cross for us. Therefore, we should be mindful of what Christ accomplished for us through His death, burial, and resurrection on a daily basis instead of reserving those thoughts for a specific day of the year.

Some Christians and businesses take Sunday off in observance of, or in obedience to, God's commands regarding the Sabbath day. They often consider it to be persecution if they experience any form of judgment or ridicule regarding their observance. Again, we are no longer under the Law of Moses, and there are no holy days in this dispensation of grace. Furthermore, few people, if anyone at

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<sup>6</sup> The revelation to Paul differed from the original last supper of Jesus and His disciples (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20). In the original supper, Jesus did not tell the disciples to repeat it, and there is no record in Scripture that they did so. Only through Christ's revelation to Paul do we know *for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup...* (I Corinthians 11:23-26).



all, actually observe the Sabbath restrictions outlined in Scripture, the breaking of which was to result in death (Exodus 31:12-15; Leviticus 23). It is wise not to work every day of the week, or at least too many days in a row without a break from work. But this should be for physical and mental health reasons, and for preservation of relationships, and not to observe a holy day.

As believers, it is important to set aside time for worship and fellowship with other brethren (Hebrews 10:23-25), whether it is on a Sunday or any other day of the week. However, it is not correct for us to refer to Sunday (or Saturday) as the Sabbath Day or the Lord's Day. Paul established many churches and referred to churches in the homes of his coworkers (Romans 16:3-5; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2), but he never mentioned when these churches met because no day is more important than another.

### **Abortion and Homosexuality**

Abortion and homosexuality aren't related subjects, but have been considered in the same context by many Christians and organizations that claim to be Christian. Those who identify or agree with the so-called *Christian right* movement in the last 45 – 50 years have supported or worked in the political sphere to outlaw, among other things, all abortions and severely restrict the rights of people who consider themselves to be some type of homosexual person—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, plus other non-heterosexual identities (LGBTQ+). Correspondingly, any resistance to these efforts is considered to be persecution. Should we really consider it this way, or are we bringing persecution upon ourselves?

#### ***Abortion***

The legal allowance of abortion in America is considered to be an abomination by Christians and the primary symptom of sinfulness in this nation. Beginning in the late 1970s, various American Christian organizations, under the overall umbrella of the *Christian right* coalition, began a concerted effort to influence political decisions with the intent of abolishing abortion. What came to be known as the *pro-life* movement (against all abortion) was opposed by those who considered themselves to be *pro-choice* (a woman's right to an abortion). This opposition was viewed as persecution against what they viewed as their just and godly cause because Christian morality was under attack.

Under the *Roe v. Wade* decision by the Supreme Court of the United States in January 22, 1973, a legal and safe abortion was considered to be a constitutional right. This decision was overturned under the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision by the Supreme Court on June 24, 2022, leaving abortion legislation up to each individual state. Current and proposed legislation indicates that many states are instituting similar or more restrictive abortion laws to those that were in place before 1973. However, a number of states have shown that they will allow abortions, though some with certain restrictions. So, legal abortion will remain with us to some extent.

Brethren, abortion is a very complicated subject. Neither abortion, nor any reference or implication to a woman terminating her pregnancy, is mentioned in the Bible. However, as Christians we have developed a doctrine regarding abortion. God considers us to be conceived in sin; that is, we inherit the sin nature upon conception (Psalm 51:5). He also formed us in the womb (Psalm 139:13-16). Therefore, for most of my adult life I was taught and believed that God considers us to be living beings

(persons) in the womb and that all abortions are murder. Have we drawn the correct conclusions? I now am certain that we haven't.

An unbiased study of Scripture demonstrates that abortion is not considered by God to be murder. In the eyes of God, a fetus that miscarries (*an untimely birth*) is as if it had never existed (Job 3:11-16; Ecclesiastes 6:3-5). In fact, in the only example of an induced miscarriage in the Bible, the miscarried fetus is considered as property to be compensated for as such. These scriptural truths are unknown to or ignored by Christians who consider abortion to be murder.

**O God, shatter their [*wicked men's*] teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord. Let them flow away like water that runs off; when he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. Let them be as a snail which melts away [*has disappearing slime*] as it goes along, like the miscarriages [*untimely births*] of a woman which never see the sun.** (Psalm 58:6-8)

**“And if men struggle with each other and strike a woman with child so that she has a miscarriage [*her fruit depart from her*], yet there is no further injury [*to the woman*], he shall surely be fined as the woman's husband may demand of him, and he shall pay as the judges decide. But if there is any further injury [*to the woman*], then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.”** (Exodus 21:22-25)

From the perspective of living adults, we can understand as King David did that we were conceived in sin and that we were formed by God while in the womb. From God's perspective, however, our life begins with our first breath (of a viable birth) and ends with our last breath. This scriptural truth is unknown to or ignored by Christians who believe that the Bible says that our life as a living being starts at conception.

**Then the Lord God formed man [*Adam*] of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and [*the*] man became a living being [*soul*].** (Genesis 2:7)

**Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and its offspring, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it.** (Isaiah 42:5)

**And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people.** (Genesis 25:8; see also Genesis 25:17; 35:29; 49:33; Acts 5:5, 10)

Abortion, therefore, is not ending the life of a living being. These are concepts unrecognized, and I'm afraid vehemently denied, by those who support the *pro-life* movement. I humbly ask that you read my study **Abortion** that explains how and why I reached these conclusions. Although I recognize that abortion is the wrong choice for believers in many cases, I believe that it isn't wrong in all cases and can't be construed as murder based on Scripture. Brethren, abortion is never mentioned or described in Scripture and we aren't in a position to add it in. It appears, therefore, that there is no scriptural basis for trying to change our nations laws to end abortion and that the seeming persecution that results from these efforts is false persecution brought on by our own actions.

Under *Roe v. Wade* and even now, laws that allow abortion don't require or force anyone to have an abortion. Believers have had abortions, but no laws forced them to do so. Many states had laws

prohibiting fornication and adultery, but most of those laws have been stricken from the books, and are considered to be archaic and are no longer enforced where they remain. Because God considers fornication and adultery as sins (I Corinthians 6:9-10, 18-20), shouldn't believers be fighting against those sins, also? After all, a large percentage of abortions are undertaken to end unwanted pregnancies resulting from fornication or adultery. It would be sobering and shameful to know how many brethren have committed those sins.

Please think about the following question: Is it our responsibility as believers to protest or fight against laws that allow abortion, and then consider it to be persecution if we are opposed by those who support abortion? I believe that the answer is "No" to both aspects of this question. Recall the previous discussion regarding the *Ten Commandments*. Under the Law of Moses, murder was to be punished by death. However, the death penalty was also to be applied for adultery (to *both* participants), breaking the Sabbath day requirements, and even striking or cursing one's mother or father. In God's eyes, therefore, these sins are as serious as murder. If God considered abortion to be murder, I believe that He would have clearly said so in Scripture.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Homosexuality***

Unlike abortion, homosexuality is mentioned a number of times in Scripture. In all cases, it is considered as sin by God. Those who believe that homosexuality is approved by God must change or add to the Bible to support their conclusion. Nevertheless, homosexuality, homosexual acts, and same-sex marriage are protected by current laws. Consequently, supporters of the *Christian right* have devoted much effort to prevent or overturn laws that protect all forms of homosexuality. Unfortunately, they often do so in hypocritical and judgmental ways, and use Scripture inappropriately to justify their efforts. In response to their efforts, they have been labeled as *homophobic* (i.e., afraid of those who are homosexual) and consider themselves to be persecuted.

Homosexuality is sin because God, who created us, says it is sin (Romans 1:24-27; I Corinthians 6:9-11; I Timothy 1:8-11; Leviticus 18:22). Furthermore, under the Law of Moses, God said it was a sin deserving death (Leviticus 20:13). Even before instituting His Law through Moses, God destroyed two cities (Sodom and Gomorrah) because of their homosexuality (Genesis 13:13; 18:20; 19:1-5, 24-29). We need to remember, however, that we are no longer under the Law of Moses but under the grace of God. Because everyone sins, everyone is separated from God and deserves death. However, anyone and everyone who believes that Christ died for our sins is forgiven and alive in Christ. There is no room for judgment or boasting on our part (I Corinthians 1:26-31). Amongst ourselves, we need to teach our fellow brethren that homosexuality in all forms is sinful and is never justified in the eyes of God, but we need to do so with humility and grace because we all sin and are capable of falling into all forms of sin.

Homosexuality is now lawful, as is same-sex marriage, in many countries including America. Should believers fight the laws that allow this behavior? Should we mistreat those who we know or think are homosexual (or whatever sexuality other than heterosexual as God intended)? No; instead, we should take the same approach as we would when dealing with any sin in this ungodly world. We need to remember that before we were saved, God considered *all* of us to be dead in sin, living as children of

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<sup>7</sup> Abortion was an accepted practice by Egyptians during the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, as well as in the cultures during the subsequent Greek and Roman empires. The Israelites most likely would have known about abortion.

wrath—as the children of Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). We must humbly remember that all believers continue to sin (Romans 7:14-25). We are exhorted to treat others as we want to be treated and leave judgment to God (Romans 12:17-21; 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:29 – 5:2; Colossians 3:12-14; I Thessalonians 5:14-15).

## Christian Justice

Does God really want us to seek justice for those who undermine Christianity or Christian principles? Our struggle is not against flesh and blood—it is spiritual. If we, personally, are being tempted to sin or are being persecuted for our faith, we are to stand fast and take up the full armor of God to resist evil (Ephesians 6:10-17; I Corinthians 15:58). However, standing fast with regard to temptation, sin, or persecution does not mean getting back, getting even, or fighting for our Christian rights. We are not to waiver in our knowledge of the truth or deny who we are in Christ, but we are to leave judgment and retribution to God (Romans 12:17-21; Matthew 23:29-35).

Did Christ want to get back at those who rejected, scourged, and crucified Him? No; instead, He asked God that they be forgiven (Luke 23:34; I Peter 2:21-24). Did Stephen want judgment for those who rejected his testimony and stoned him? No; instead, he asked God that they be forgiven (Acts 7:58-60). Did Paul gather all the best lawyers to plead his case and for release from Roman imprisonment? Apparently not, for he accepted the fact that he was in prison for the sake of Christ and for us, and that he faced a death sentence during his last imprisonment (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1; II Timothy 1:8; 4:6). Paul knew that those who worked against him and his ministry would be repaid by God (II Timothy 4:14).

**For you have been called to this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him [God] who judges righteously. (I Peter 2:21-23)**

Paul warned the Corinthian brethren against suing one another, for to do so would require them to use the world's system of justice (I Corinthians 6:1-8). Therefore, if we are not to sue fellow believers, it is not a stretch to say that God doesn't want us to sue non-believers. Why is this? We need to remember that God is sovereign, that He loves us, and that He is working everything out according to His will (Romans 8:28; Philippians 2:13). Furthermore, we are exhorted to forgive others because we have been forgiven by God through Christ (Ephesians 4:31-32).

## How Do We Stand?

Instead of trying to change our city, state, country, or world, how are we representing God and our Lord Jesus Christ in our individual lives? Are we prepared to suffer the consequences if our stand is rejected, whether it results in ridicule, loss of fellowship (with friends, relatives, fellow believers, etc.), loss of a job, or even loss of our life? Ask these questions of ourselves and think of other situations where our stand counts. Remember, if we live a gospel life for Christ, we will suffer.

- Am I ready and willing to share the gospel of salvation with a relative, friend, coworker, or classmate (Colossians 4:5-6; II Corinthians 5:20)?

- Will I affirm, or deny, my faith if asked (I Peter 3:13-17; I Corinthians 15:58)?
- If someone says that they heal, speak in tongues, or submit to water baptism, or at least profess to believe that these are acceptable practices, am I willing to disagree and explain why (I Corinthians 13:8; Ephesians 4:4-6; II Timothy 2:15)?<sup>8</sup>
- If asked where I stand on fornication, homosexuality, or any sexual relationship outside of marriage, am I willing to say (humbly and without judgment) that I believe that sexual immorality is wrong because God says it is wrong (I Corinthians 6:9-11, 18-20)?<sup>9</sup>
- If I personally know that someone is falsely accused of something, am I willing to stand up for him or her (II Timothy 4:16-17)?
- Am I prepared to answer a question truthfully, knowing that a lie would enable me to avoid a difficult situation (Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9)?<sup>10</sup>
- Am I willing to say “No” to a friend who wants me to watch an inappropriate movie or TV show, or who wants me to go to a bar for a few drinks, or who wants me to try drugs, or wants me to do anything I know is wrong (I Corinthians 15:33-34; II Timothy 2:22)?
- Am I willing to correct and help a Christian friend or relative who is openly engaging in sinful activities (Galatians 6:1; II Thessalonians 3:14-15; II Timothy 3:16-17)?
- Am I willing to say or do the right thing in God’s eyes (humbly, yet with conviction), regardless of the consequences (II Corinthians 13:7; Philippians 4:8; I Peter 2:20; 3:13-17)?

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord. (I Corinthians 15:58)**

### **How Should We Live as We Face Persecution and Suffering?**

Brethren, where do we stop if we try to moralize America, or whichever nation we belong to? All believers will continue to sin until we join our Lord in heaven through death or the rapture (I Corinthians 15:50-57). The unbelieving world will be sinful until the final judgment by Christ at the great white throne (Revelation 20:11-15). However, there is much we should, and should not, do when we are faced with true persecution and suffering that result from living and standing for the word of God and for our Lord Jesus Christ in truth and love. We should put our trust in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. We should not shrink back from adversity, give up on the Lord, depend on our own strength, or turn to sin. God revealed to us how He wants us to respond to persecution. We should:

- Expect and accept suffering if we live for Christ because we are living in an evil age (Galatians 1:4; II Timothy 3:12).
- Forgive those who wrong or defraud us (Ephesians 4:32; Romans 12:20-21; I Corinthians 6:7).
- Not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1-2).

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<sup>8</sup> See my studies **The Two Messages of Our Lord Jesus Christ, The Mystery (God’s Secret Plan), Should We Be Baptized?**, and others that address these subjects.

<sup>9</sup> See my study **Abortion** that addresses sexual immorality.

<sup>10</sup> The example of Rahab indicates that a lie is acceptable to God when it protects someone else according to the will of God (Joshua 2:1-14). I believe that lying to Nazi authorities regarding hiding a Jew or other politically unacceptable person was honored by God.

- Work quietly with our own hands, lead a quiet life, attend to our own business, behave properly towards the unsaved, and do good works; furthermore, we should not bring attention to ourselves while doing so (I Thessalonians 4:9-12; II Thessalonians 3:10-13; Galatians 6:9-10; Titus 3:8).<sup>11</sup>
- If possible, be at peace with all men and never take revenge, because God will judge the unrighteous (Romans 12:17-21).
- Walk worthy of our salvation and in a manner that does not grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:1-3, 25-32; Colossians 1:9-12).
- Walk as children of light and be good examples to those around us (Ephesians 5:3-14; Titus 2:7-8).
- Speak the truth and not lie (Ephesians 4:25).
- Obey those in authority, unless they require us to sin (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-17).<sup>12</sup>
- Live by the Spirit and not according to the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16-26).<sup>13</sup>
- Abstain from every form of evil (I Thessalonians 5:21-22).
- Share the gospel of salvation with the lost—loved ones, friends, coworkers, etc. (II Corinthians 5:20).<sup>14</sup>
- Pray for each other (Philippians 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 5:17, 25).
- Be thankful to God in all things, even when being persecuted for standing for God and Christ (I Thessalonians 5:18; Colossians 3:12-17).

**Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things.**  
(Philippians 4:6-8)

## Conclusions

This study really only skims the surface on what the Bible reveals about suffering for the sake of God or our Lord Jesus Christ. There are so many more examples in Scripture of persecution suffered by people of God. Additionally, there are many more examples than addressed herein of perceived persecution that believers bring upon themselves through a misunderstanding or misapplication of Scripture.

As Christians, especially in America perhaps, we have been conditioned to think that Christianity is under attack and that more and more laws are infringing on our Christian rights. We are taught that persecution for the sake of Christ is a bad thing that we must actively fight against. However, Scripture

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<sup>11</sup> See my study **Let Us Be Humble** that shows the importance of humility over pride.

<sup>12</sup> There are times when God expects us to disobey those in authority (e.g., Daniel 3:1-18; 6:3-18; Acts 4:1-20). See my study **Governing Authority** that addresses how God wants us to respond to our political leadership.

<sup>13</sup> See my study **Fruit of the Spirit** that explains how the Holy Spirit works through us and the character attributes we are to exhibit.

<sup>14</sup> When Paul was imprisoned, he used it as an opportunity to speak the truth of God and share the gospel of salvation (Acts 16:23-34; 24:1-25; 26:1-29; Philippians 1:12-14; 4:22).

tells us that true persecution and suffering are a blessing. Furthermore, fighting for our Christian rights is unscriptural because, as believers, we do not have Christian rights in this world. We are children of God, and not children of the god of this world. We are not even of this world; instead, we are citizens of heaven and, therefore, ambassadors for Christ in this world (II Corinthians 5:20).

If we are suffering persecution for the sake of Christ and for living according the revealed will of God, then we should be thankful to God and praise Him. We must be careful, however, to examine ourselves and Scripture to make sure that we, indeed, are suffering for the right reasons. If we aren't suffering for Christ, on the other hand, we need to evaluate our lives to see if we are living in a manner that is in conformance with the world instead of walking worthy of our salvation.

**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (Romans 8:28-31)**

**For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline [a sound mind]. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me [*Paul*] His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling; not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. (II Timothy 1:7-9)**

**Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (Ephesians 6:10-11)**

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