

WHAT DOES THE COMING PERSECUTION LOOK LIKE?

INTRODUCTION

- Because Christians live in a rebellious, Christ-hating world, persecution has always been the norm for them throughout church history
- Open Doors defines persecution as “any hostility experienced as a result of identification with Christ”
- Some statistics

Historical Christian Persecution Statistics

- More than **70 million Christians** have been martyred in the course of history. More than half were martyred in the 20th century under communist and fascist government ([Gordon-Conwell Resources](#)).
- In the 21st century, roughly **100,000 to 160,000 Christians** were killed each year ([Gordon-Conwell Resources](#) and [World Christian Database](#), respectively).
- Roughly **1,093,000 Christians** were martyred, worldwide, between 2000 and 2010 ([World Christian Database](#)).

Modern, Global Church Persecution Statistics

- **322 Christians** are killed for their faith every month ([Open Doors](#)).
- **214 churches and Christian properties** are destroyed every month ([Open Doors](#)).
- **772 forms of violence** (beatings, kidnappings, rape, arrest, etc.) are committed against Christians every month ([Open Doors](#)).

EACH MONTH

322 CHRISTIANS ARE KILLED FOR THEIR FAITH



214 CHURCHES AND CHRISTIAN PROPERTIES ARE DESTROYED

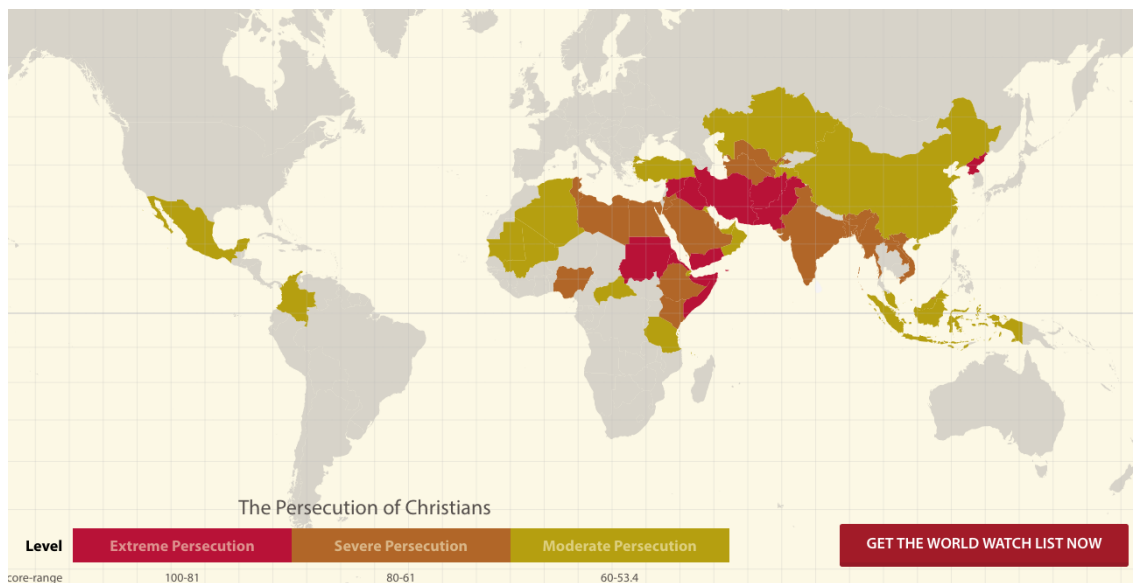


772 FORMS OF VIOLENCE ARE COMMITTED AGAINST CHRISTIANS (SUCH AS BEATINGS, ABDUCTIONS, RAPES, ARRESTS AND FORCED MARRIAGES)



- Christians in more than **60 countries** face persecution from their governments or neighbors because of their faith ([United States Department of State](#)).

- According to VOM, more Christians were killed for their faith in the 20th century than were martyred in the total history of Christianity
- Justin D. Long: “During [the 20th] century, we have documented cases in excess of 26 million martyrs. From AD 33 to 1900, we have documented 14 million martyrs.”
- The 10 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution are, in order:
 1. North Korea
 2. Somalia
 3. Afghanistan
 4. Pakistan
 5. Sudan
 6. Syria
 7. Iraq
 8. Iran
 9. Yemen
 10. Eritrea



¹ <http://theestherproject.com/statistics/>

CURRENT PERSECUTION IN THE WEST

- For many years, the Western church has been largely exempt from the type of intense, violent persecution that has so characterized believers for millennia
- However, the tide has been turning in recent decades with a significant uptick in opposition against believers even within the last year
- Although believers are not frequently martyred for their faith in the West, there is a rise in the hatred against them

- “Although the flavor and intensity of the world’s persecution may vary from generation to generation, hostility toward Christianity has been a constant throughout church history. Indeed, anti-Christian persecution is a surprisingly widespread—and growing—problem in the world today, not only in parts of the world that are dominated by other religions, but also in countries where religious liberty was once celebrated. In America, for example, secularists have waged a daunting campaign for nearly five decades to drive the church out of the public square. Christian values and biblical convictions are increasingly under attack from the government, the media, and the entertainment industry. Most persecution in our culture today consists chiefly of scorn, insults, and legal threats. But with the current drift of public opinion, it may not be long before the church in the West begins to face persecution on a scale comparable to what the early church suffered.”²

- The *Secular Democrats of America* aim to wipe Christian values from the landscape of our country
- Recently, they produced a 28-page document for the Biden administration that calls Christians “anti-democratic,” “unscientific,” and “a national security threat” to the United States
- It calls for the removal of every aspect of religious freedom and to grant more consideration to atheists and Muslims
 - “We urge you [President Biden] not to underestimate the institutional strength of what we refer to...as the ‘Christian nationalist movement’ or the ‘religious right’...Its political ideology is anti-democratic and anti-scientific. It provides constant cover for white supremacy. And it advanced a reactionary economic policy, tax policy, and dominionist view of the environment that undermines our capacity and will to address the climate crisis. Its agenda rests on a pinched interpretation of biblical principles preached by Christian nationalist leadership and thought leaders.”
 - “We ask that you counter this movement’s narrative by actively working to dismantle its grip on our government and counter its inaccurate and revisionist messaging around our nation’s founding.”
 - “Taxpayer dollars should not be funneled either to contractors or grantees that discriminate on the basis of religion, or to programs that promote a sectarian agenda, such as private religious schools, crisis pregnancy centers, and abstinence-only sex education.”³

- Christians who reject CRT and intersectionality as godless ideologies rather than merely analytical tools to address racism will likely be labeled as a public health threat
 - “What we know is this: racism is a serious public health threat that directly affects the well-being of millions of Americans. As a result, it affects the health of our entire nation. Racism is not just the discrimination against one group based on the color of their skin or their race or ethnicity, but the structural barriers that impact racial and ethnic groups differently to influence where a person lives, where they work, where their children play, and where they gather in community. Over generations, these structural inequities have resulted in stark racial and ethnic health disparities that are severe, far-

² John MacArthur, *The Upper Room*, 197-198.

³ https://seculardems.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SecularDemocratsOfAmerica_Blueprint_BidenHarrisTransition_11-30-20_FINAL.pdf

reaching and unacceptable. The American Public Health Association has created an [interactive map](#) that shows declarations of racism as a public health crisis or emergency across the United States.”⁴

- The persecution of Canadian pastors and churches due to covid restrictions
 - The arrest and imprisonment of Pastor James Coates and seizing of their building⁵
 - The arrest and imprisonment of Pastor Tim Stephens⁶
 - The seizing of the Trinity Bible Chapel’s church building⁷
 - The locking of The Church of God⁸
- All of this underscores the fact that we must be prepared to suffer for the name of Christ
- “If you live in a democratic, secularized society, you will not be tortured, killed, or put in a concentration camp. But you will be discriminated against, verbally ridiculed, threatened with lawsuits, or labeled an intolerant bigot. Your neighbors may not want to associate with you or even speak to you. You may be accused of ‘misinterpreting Jesus’s beautiful message of love, tolerance, inclusivism, social justice, and world peace.’ As our Western societies become more godless and secularized, expect opposition to escalate...A new, more aggressive, hostile secularism has emerged in recent years. Proponents of this new, militant secularism are intolerant of historic Christian teaching. They are determined to silence biblical Christianity by even passing laws that will criminalize certain Christian beliefs.”⁹

BIBLICAL EVIDENCE THAT BELIEVERS WILL BE PERSECUTED

- Although the persecution faced by Christians in the first century was often more overt and violent, it is helpful to remember that the opposition we face is not unique to us

It is Consistent with What Has Always Happened to Faithful Believers

Luke 6:22-23 ~ Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. 23 Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

- OT prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel were all persecuted for obeying the Lord

Hebrews 11:36-40 ~ and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

- “Since the day Cain killed his godly brother Abel, this world and the god of this world have been at war with God, his prophets, his people, and his Messiah. This is the oldest continuous war on the planet. It is between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15).”¹⁰

⁴ <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/director-commentary.html>

⁵ <https://thecrippleate.com/why-pastor-james-coates-imprisonment-is-actual-persecution/>

⁶ <https://www.theblaze.com/news/another-pastor-arrested-covid-canada>

⁷ https://trinitybiblechapel.ca/we-lost-the-building-and-kept-the-church/?fbclid=IwAR2UaF6-tyFe1GoSGIrRQ99Ra_Yl7QORfm0g_-s3XsQsr8klrGRbtUYRnCo

⁸ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/aylmer-church-doors-ordered-locked-1.6026514>

⁹ Alexander Strauch, *Acts 20: Fierce Wolves Are Coming – Guard the Flock*, 44-45.

¹⁰ Ibid., 40.

- Examples from the early church prove this

- James the brother of John – beheaded
- Philip – scourged, thrown into prison, then crucified
- Matthew – died in Ethiopia by being chopped apart by a halberd
- James the son of Alphaeus – beaten and stoned by the Jews at age 94, still not dead they clubbed him to death
- Matthias – stoned in Jerusalem and then beheaded
- Andrew – crucified on an X-shaped cross
- Peter – crucified upside down
- Bartholomew – cruelly beaten and crucified
- Thomas (aka Didymus) – killed by pagan priests who thrust a spear through him
- Thaddeus – stoned to death
- Simon the zealot – crucified
- John – captured at Ephesus, taken to Rome and boiled in oil, banished him to the Isle of Patmos

- Polycarp

- Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John who lived between 70 and 155 AD...bishop of Smyrna
- He was arrested on the charge of being a Christian
- The Roman proconsul took pity on such a gentle old man and urged Polycarp to proclaim, “Caesar is Lord”
- To this Polycarp responded, “Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”
- Steadfast in his stand for Christ, Polycarp refused to compromise his beliefs and was burned alive at the stake

- John Hooper was martyred during the Marian persecution in the mid-1500s that resulted in nearly 300 men being burned at the stake

- Hooper was the bishop of Gloucester...refused to stop preaching when Queen Mary ordered him to...imprisoned 18 months
- On the morning of his martyrdom, he was led through Gloucester where an immense crowd of 7000 waited for him
- After he had prayed, he was given one last opportunity to recant of his teaching and preaching the Word which he refused
- He was fastened to the stake by an iron around his waist...three times the wood had to be lighted because it would not burn
- For 45 minutes Hooper endured the flames as Fox says “neither moving backward, forward, nor to any side” but only praying and beating his breast with one hand until it was burned to a stump”

- “Today that same hate-filled anger is directed to anyone who would proclaim the biblical gospel of a crucified Savior, risen from the dead and coming back again to judge the world. Ultimately, this scorn and hostility against Christians is Satan’s hate-filled fury against Christians and his redeemed people...*This world is at war with its Creator and with all who align themselves with Christ.*”¹¹

Jesus Predicted the Inevitability of Persecution

Matthew 10:16-18, 21-23 ~ Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves. 17 But beware of men, for they will hand you over to the courts and scourge you in their synagogues; 18 and you will even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles...21 Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. 22 You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. 23 But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

John 15:18-23 ~ If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave 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. 21 But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates Me hates My Father also.

¹¹ Ibid, 42. (emphasis original)

- Christians are persecuted by the world because the world hates Christ (v. 18, 20)
- Jesus was the target of the world's opposition such that the entire three years of His ministry He endured its opposition, culminating in an unjust arrest and gruesome crucifixion
- Since the world persecuted Christ, it will also persecute His followers
- Christians are persecuted by the world because they are not like the world (v. 19)
- To live contrary to the world and its wickedness is to incur the world's wrath and opposition
- Because the Lord chose/elected us out of the world, we are distinct from it...in it but not of it
- As such, we are not likely to prove popular with those who continue in their wickedness
- Christians are persecuted by the world because they do not know God (v. 21)
- It is a spiritual issue in that they are blind to the glories of God and His Son
- Christians are persecuted by the world because Christ and His Word exposes their sin (v. 22)
- He reveals who they really are and they don't like being exposed...so they lash out

The Apostles Predicted the Inevitability of Persecution

Paul

Acts 14:22 ~ strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

Philippians 1:29 ~ For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

1 Thessalonians 3:3-4 ~ so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

2 Timothy 3:12 ~ Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

- The inevitability of suffering and persecution were regular topics of Paul's instructions to his converts

John

1 John 3:13 ~ Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

- Since the world is in the hands of the evil one (1 John 5:19), it is expected that the world would vent its hatred against believers
- "The entire world system—every government, philosophy, movement, and trend—are pitched in direct opposition to the Lord and His Word. Some are more blatant about it than others, but every aspect of life in this world that has not been redeemed by God is working in contradiction to Him. No wonder we feel out of place."¹²

Peter

1 Peter 2:11 ~ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

- As believers, we spend our lives as aliens and strangers in a world that is hostile to Christ and to us as well

¹² <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B151019/the-friction-of-faith>

1 Peter 4:12-19 ~ Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

- We should not be surprised when persecution comes our way...it is normal to the Christian life (v. 12)
- It is a privilege to share in Christ's afflictions because all the suffering in this life pales in comparison to the joy that will result at Christ's coming (v. 13)
- Our hearts should overflow with thanksgiving in the midst of suffering because it is during those times that we experience a greater measure of the Spirit's ministry in our lives (v. 14)
- Our suffering must not be the result of sin (v. 15; cf. 2:20; 3:17)
- We should never be ashamed of suffering for the name of Christ (v. 16)
- Persecution is one of the ways that God grows and purifies His people (v. 17-18)
- We must entrust ourselves to the Lord to care for us in the midst of suffering (v. 19)

RESPONSES TO IMPENDING PERSECUTION

We Must Rejoice in Suffering for the Gospel

Matthew 5:10-12 ~ Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Acts 5:41 ~ So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.

1 Peter 3:14 ~ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED

- Suffering for the Gospel is participation in Christ's sufferings
- Believers who suffer are blessed because they are now enjoying God's favor

We Must Recognize that It Tests the Genuineness of Our Faith

1 Peter 1:6-7 ~ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

- Although we will never face God's judgment for sin (Rom 8:1), God does at times allow difficulties and suffering in our lives to purify us and to mature, convict, and grow us
- When we are persecuted for the cause of Christ, we come to know Him better (Phil 3:10)

- So, God may allow persecution in our lives, not for our harm, but to make us more like Jesus

Matthew 13:20-21 ~ The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

- Some people's commitment to Christ is only superficial, which is revealed when opposition or persecution comes against them
- When there is a cost to following Christ, they then abandon Christ
- In other words, false believers are exposed by means of persecution

We Must Respond with Godly Character and Holiness

- Suffering for the Gospel builds stable character

Romans 5:3-4 ~ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

1 Peter 1:14-16 ~ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

1 Peter 4:7-9 ~ The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. 4:8 Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

- Despite the persecution we face, we must live in light of the fact that Christ is returning
- And that truth should promote an intentional pursuit of holiness, remembering that we are citizens of heaven rather than citizens of this world
- "Personal holiness is essential to standing firm against persecution. And that is because you will not suffer for a God whom you will not obey. You will not suffer for a God in wartime whom you will not obey in peacetime. You will not persevere in obedience to God unto the loss of your freedom, or unto the loss of your property, if you can't obey in the secret place when all your obedience costs you is the false-pleasures of sin. Christians who care nothing for pursuing communion with Christ in disciplined prayer and Bible reading don't go to jail for Christ. Christians who don't devote themselves to the assembly of the saints and the ministry of the local church don't joyfully accept the seizure of their property for the name of Christ. Christians who don't find Christ satisfying enough that His glory severs the bonds of their lusts don't lay down their lives for the Gospel. If you compromise when all discipleship costs you is the lusts of your flesh, you will not stand on conviction when following Jesus costs you your family. Those unconcerned with holiness do not stand in the day of real trial."¹³

We Must Follow Christ's Example in the Midst of Persecution

- Jesus is the supreme example of suffering at the hands of sinners

1 Peter 2:21-23 ~ For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously;

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/mike.riccardi.5/posts/4118098451573537>

- Those who are oppressed have the greatest opportunity for real Gospel witness when they respond to oppression by following the example given by Christ in His oppression
- In responding with forgiveness, kindness, and love, such oppressed people become attractive Gospel lights

We Must Anticipate Heavenly Glory

Romans 8:16-18 ~ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. 18 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.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 ~ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- We must continue walking by faith in the Lord no matter the opposition we face until the day that our faith becomes sight
- Although there is suffering now, there is unimaginable, heavenly glory that will follow

We Must Not be Fearful

Matthew 10:28 ~ Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Philippians 1:27-28a ~ Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; 28 in no way alarmed by your opponents...

1 Peter 3:14 ~ But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED,

- “Paul’s instruction to stand firm without being frightened calls for Christians not to be agitated and terrified on the battlefield as horses often are. Christians are not to be intimidated in any way. No matter how powerful the opposition is, nothing should shake the resolve of those who stand firm in the one Spirit. Lined up side by side as one person, they should not be scared by any threats or any torture. They should not run from any battle, back down from any attack, compromise anything, or concede in any way.”¹⁴

We May Flee and Defend Ourselves by Appealing for Legal Protection

Acts 9:23-25 ~ When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him, 24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were also watching the gates day and night so that they might put him to death; 25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket.

Acts 14:5-6 ~ And when an attempt was made by both the Gentiles and the Jews with their rulers, to mistreat and to stone them, 6 they became aware of it and fled to the cities of Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region;

Acts 17:10 ~ The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Acts 22:25 ~ But when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?”

- It is appropriate to flee life-threatening persecution and to use all legal means to protect against persecution

¹⁴ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 98.