"DON'T FLINCH IN THE FACE OF SUFFERING"

I Peter 3:13-17

3/15/2000

INTRODUCTION: Verse 13

***Don't flinch** (retreat, give up or give in) **even in the face of suffering!**

Why should you remain firm in the face of suffering?

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

I. You can be considered "<u>BLESSED</u>" (fortunate)! (v. 14)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

II. You can turn your crisis into an opportunity for <u>WITNESS</u> (v. 15)

"Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

III. You can maintain a "<u>GOOD CONSCIENCE</u>" (v. 16a)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

IV. You can be a source of <u>CONVICTION</u> (v. 16b)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

V. You can fulfill <u>GOD'S WILL</u> (v. 17)

CONCLUSION:

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Fox's Book of Martyrs illustrates many who refused to flinch even in the face of the most gruesome torture and martyrdom.

As the book of I Peter clearly indicates, God's people are not exempt from unjust suffering.

One fallacy of pre-tribulationalism is the false notion that Antichrist's persecution equals God's wrath. Note: The Church is promised deliverance from God's wrath (I Thes. 5:9), but never from Satan's! (or Antichrist's)

Jesus said, *"In the world you shall have tribulation"* (Jn. 16:33)

"It is given unto you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29) SEE: Rev. 6:9, 7:14

V. 13

The rhetorical question demands the answer "No one." At least (as we will learn), no one usually (there are exceptions).

"Followers" - zealous or enthusiastic to do good

Doing right can keep you out of a lot of trouble with others (this is a lesson especially applicable to our teenagers).

Solomon said, A mischief maker is like one who grabs a dog by the ears (you're going to be bitten!).

Prov. 16:7 - *"When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."*

***Don't flinch** (retreat, give up or give in) **even in the face of suffering!**

Why should you remain firm in the face of suffering?

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

I. You can be considered "<u>BLESSED</u>" (fortunate)! (v. 14)

Why would anyone inflict suffering on someone who is living righteous?

"For righteousness sake"

"For righteousness sake" - because you do right (justly)

There is no blessing in being persecuted if you did wrong and are getting what you deserve (I Pet. 4:15 - "But let non of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.")

Two basic reasons why those who live righteously would be opposed:

a. Righteousness is a <u>rebuke</u> to unrighteousness

The reason people would persecute the righteous is because their righteousness is a rebuke to their unrighteousness.

Doing good is a rebuke to their doing bad.
Holiness is a rebuke to impurity.
Honesty is a rebuke to lying, fraud, and theft
Light is a rebuke to darkness.

Lost men, in an effort to extinguish the light that exposes their darkness, strike out at the light.

Do you ever wonder why when you seek to help some people, they get angry? EX: Acts 7)

It is because you have struck a tender nerve. You have hit a sore spot; you have opened a closet; you have exposed a secret. You have uncovered the truth; often the truth hurts.

Righteousness by its very nature is confrontational; it cuts across the grain of the world.

Godliness will generate antagonism, hot emotions, and hostility from the world. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33)

EX: Savanarola (MacArthur, p. 221)

b. <u>Satan</u> hates righteousness

We have an adversary (I Pet. 5:8) who wants to keep men blind to the truth (II Cor. 4:4), so he incites lost men (who are at his disposal) to stir up opposition to the truth in order to turn men away from the truth (EX: Elymas the Sorcerer - Acts 13:8, 10) (EX: The masters who exploited a demon-possessed girl - Acts 16:19-20) (EX: The unbelieving Jews - Acts 17:5) (EX: The Ephesian craftsmen - Acts 19:27-29)

Persecution is an earmark of Godly living (II Tim. 3:12 - "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.")

It is an inevitable "gift" (Phil. 1:29 - "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake")

ILLUS: The Secret Christian (MacArthur, p. 220)

"More and more, Christians in today's society are going to be accused and lied about. Our personal standards are not those of the unsaved world. As a rule, Christians do not <u>create</u> problems; they <u>reveal</u> them. Let a born-again person start to work in an office, or move into a college dormitory, and in a short time there will be problems. Christians are lights in this dark world (Phil. 2:15), and they reveal 'the unfruitful works of darkness' (Eph. 5:11)." (Wiersbe, p. 414-15)

Ex: Joseph, Daniel, and Jesus Christ.

If Christians were being put in jail for their righteousness, would there be enough evidence is your life to convict you?

"Happy" does not mean "delight" but "blessed" or "highly privileged" (EX: the rejoicing of Peter and John after being flogged - Acts 5:40-41 - *"And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."*)

"Happy are ye" - You are blessed! Why?

1) Because you did <u>right</u>!

2) Because you are like <u>Jesus</u> (v. 18)

3) Because such treatment confirms to you that you are right and that there is a real devil (adversary)

4) Because this is an evidence of your salvation (4:14)

5) Because you are upholding a faithful testimony

"Be not afraid" - The only one to be feared is the one who can take body and soul and cast it into hell fire (Mt. 10:28 - *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.")*

"Neither be troubled" - disturbed, shaken, upset

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

II. You can turn your crisis into an opportunity for <u>WITNESS</u> (v. 15)

"But" - in contrast to focusing on fear and trouble in our hearts, we need to have our hearts set apart (from worry) for the Lord God.

Don't be obsessed with fear but with your God!

"Sanctify the Lord" - Peter alludes to Isaiah 8:13 - *"Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."*

"Be ready" - be prepared

"Always" - in good times and bad

We are not prepared (*"ready")* to give a witness if Christ does not have a special place in our hearts; or if He has been crowded out by worry or fear!

"An answer" - (*apologia* - we derive "apologetics") - to give a <u>defense</u> for what we believe and why we believe it.

The word referred to "a defense presented in court."

When we face suffering without flinching (giving up, retreating, quitting), people will want to know why and how we do it.

"What make you tick," they will ask. "Give us a 'word' concerning the confidence you have." "What would you be willing to suffer such injustices for?" they will inquire.

With ***"Meekness" -*** gentleness (not the harshness with which we are treated) (*"A soft answer turns away wrath")*

With ***"Fear"*** - not a fear of the one's we are speaking to (v. 14 says not to be fearful of them), but ***"fear"*** (deep reverence and respect) for <u>God</u>.

--A fear to <u>displease</u> Him
--A fear to <u>err</u> in our handling of His truth

"An arrogant, belligerent attitude usually turns people away." (Barbieri, p. 68)

How we say what we say is often more convincing than what we say!

Turn your crisis into an opportunity for witness; when we unflinchingly endure such, then the world will "sit up and take notice" of what we have to say.
"Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

III. You can maintain a "GOOD CONSCIENCE" (v. 16a)

"Having" - present tense, meaning: possessing or maintaining

"A good conscience" -

The conscience functions based on the truth it has and basically either accuses (says "no") or excuses (says "yes") as to whether or not something is right (Rom. 2:15).

Example: Like a judge, the conscience either approves or disapproves based upon the moral knowledge (law or standard) it has available.

1) The Law (standard) ---- 2) The *Judge ---- 3) The Verdict

Example: Like a referee, the conscience receives the rules from the rule book and sends a message to our thoughts (reasonings), saying either:

"Fair" or "Foul"
"Safe" or "Out"
"Yes" or "No"

1) The Rule book ---- 2) The *Referee ---- 3) The Call or Decision

When you unflinchingly do right, you have a *"good conscience."*

Don't defile or de-sensitize your conscience!

Beware: A conscience can be defiled (Titus 1:15) or seared (I Tim. 4:2) by deliberately violating its promptings

1) Defiled= Stained, polluted, impure (the conscience does not function right)

2) Seared= Cauterized; made insensitive, numbed (the conscience does not function at all)

"A clean conscience makes a soft pillow" (Spurgeon)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

IV. You can be a source of <u>CONVICTION</u> (v. 16b)

When you do right despite the insults, threats, and mistreatment others throw at you, such good conversation (lifestyle) which is only possible *"in Christ"* will put the opposition to <u>shame</u>!

(Convicting coals of fire will be heaped on their heads)

When we respond like Christ to our enemies (Mt. 5:44), their harsh treatment for no just cause will put them to shame (convict them of their sin), and perhaps lead to their salvation.

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

V. You can fulfill <u>GOD'S WILL</u> (v. 17)

"The will (desire) of God" - sometimes it is God's <u>will</u> that we suffer (4:19).

Why would He allow it?

--To show us that our faith is genuine (Ja. 1:3)

--To refine our faith (purge out dross) and produce maturity in us (Ja. 1:3b)

--To make us a shining testimony for His glory

(others will come to know Him; nothing is as compelling as a Christ-like way of living, responding, speaking, doing, and suffering. He is the ultimate model of being just and yet suffering - 3:18).

"The blood of the saints [i.e. which seeped into the ground] is the seed of the Church."

It is no glory to suffer patiently for wrong doing (2:20); but to suffer patiently for doing right glorifies God and fulfills His will.

CONCLUSION:

"Inscribed on Martin Luther's monument at Worms, Germany are his courageous words spoken before the church council on April 18, 1521: 'Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen.' His conscience, bound to God's Word, gave him the courage to defy the whole established church!" (Wiersbe, p. 414)

Am I a soldier of the cross

By Isaac Watts

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face?
Must I not stem the flood?
Is this vile world a friend to grace,
To help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
By faith's discerning eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all Thy armies shine
In robes of victory through the skies,
The glory shall be Thine.

More Christians are persecuted and martyred for their faith in this century than all previous centuries combined. Nearly two thirds of all Christians alive in the world today suffer persecution in varying degrees, including the loss of freedom, discrimination, imprisonment, slavery, torture and even death.

To Be a Martyr for the Lord

Sung by persecuted Christians in China

1. From the time the early church appeared on the day of Pentecost,
   the followers of the Lord all willingly sacrificed themselves.
   Tens of thousands have sacrificed their lives that the Gospel might prosper.
   As such they have obtained the crown of life.

2. Those apostles who loved the Lord to the end,
   Willingly followed the Lord down the path of suffering.
   John was exiled to the lonely isle of Patmos.
   Stephen was crushed to death with stones by the crowd.

3. Matthew was cut to death in Persia by the people.
   Mark died as his two legs were pulled apart by horses.
   Doctor Luke was cruelly hanged.
   Peter, Philip and Simon were crucified on a cross.

4. Bartholomew was skinned alive by the heathen,
   Thomas died in India as five horses pulled apart his body,
   The apostle James was beheaded by King Herod,
   Little James was cut up by a sharp saw.

5. James the brother of the Lord was stoned to death,
   Judas was bound to a pillar and died by arrows,
   Matthias had his head cut off in Jerusalem.
   Paul was a martyr under Emperor Nero.

6. I am willing to take up the cross and go forward,
   To follow the apostles down the road of sacrifice.
   That tens of thousands of precious souls can be saved,
   I am willing to leave all and be a martyr for the Lord.

   Chorus: To be a martyr for the Lord, to be a martyr for the Lord,
   I am willing to die gloriously for the Lord.

Examples of Modern Day Martyrs

Zhang Xiu ju (China), a house-church leader who was beaten to death by police in April 1996. She refused to stop holding "illegal" services in her home and to stop evangelizing.

Mehdi Diba; (Iran), a convert from Islam who was imprisoned for nine years. After his release in 1994, he was abducted and brutally murdered.

Haik Hovsepian Mehr (Iran), a pastor who refused to cease evangelizing and also spoke up in defense of Mehdi Dibaj. On January 20, 1994, he was abducted and later found stabbed to death.

Manzoor Masih (Pakistan), a father of ten who was falsely accused and jailed for "blasphemy against Islam." While out on bail, he was gunned down by Islamic extremists.

Lai Manping (China), a 22-year-old evangelist who was beaten to death by the police during a raid on a house church in March 1993.

Among the Persecuted Today. . .

Melek Akyil (Turkey), a Christian businessman arrested June 22, 1996 and falsely accused of terrorism. He's the victim of government intimidation to force the Christians to convert to Islam or leave.

Matthias Akabd (Sudan), arrested January 1995, along with his wife and baby, and has not been heard from since.

Jacob Jeyaseelan (Saudi Arabia), arrested December 22, 1995 for leading an "illegal" Christian gathering of 50 Indian Christians. A total of seven were detained and severely beaten. All but Jacob were released.

Salamat Masih (Pakistan), arrested in 1993 at the age of 12 for blasphemy and threatened with death. He was acquitted in 1995 as a result of international pressure. Extremists have placed a bounty on his life. He has fled his home and family and now lives in hiding.

Soner Onder (Turkey), at the age of 17, was arrested following a Christmas service in 1991. He was beaten and is serving a life sentence.

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves." Proverbs 31:8

International Christian Concern (ICC) is an interdenominational human rights organization for religious freedom and for assisting Christians who are victims of persecution and discrimination.

For information about how you can help persecuted Christians, write or call:

International Christians Concern
2020 Pennsylvania Avenue NW #941
Washington, DC 20006
1 800 ICC-5441

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Suffering for the Faith

By MONA CHAREN, *The Washington Times*

Lai Man Peng was a 22 year-old Chinese Christian evangelist. In 1994, at a meeting of one of China's "house churches" (a non-government- sanctioned prayer meeting), he and four other evangelists were seized by agents of the Public Security Bureau, China's KGB.

In front of the congregation, Mr. Lai and the others were beaten severely. The security officers next handed the truncheons to the congregants and ordered them to beat the preachers, on pain of being beaten themselves. Mr. Lai was so badly injured that the security team feared he would die in their presence (leaving too much to explain), so they released him. He crawled and hobbled for several miles attempting to reach his home, but finally collapsed and died on the road.

Such persecution is common-place in China, where only a fraction of the estimated 30 million to 70 million Christians belong to government-approved sects. Amnesty International reports cases of Christian women hung by their thumbs from wires and beaten with heavy rods, denied food and water and shocked with electric probes.

Elsewhere in the world, Christians face other tortures and persecutions. In Egypt and Pakistan Christians have been imprisoned and tortured merely for preaching their faith. Pakistan recently passed a blasphemy law that forbids speaking or acting against the prophet Mohammed. The punishment for violators is death. A 12- year-old Christian child was recently sentence to death under this law and was freed from Pakistan only by international pressure. He is now hiding in a Western country with a bounty on his head similar to that which keeps Salman Rushdie on the run.

Sudan is perhaps the worst violator. Its Islamic government has engaged in a policy of forcible conversion. Many of the black Sudanese in the southern part of the country (the north is Arab) have resisted conversion, in many cases because of adherence to Christianity (a criminal act under Sudanese law). As punishment, the Sudanese government has denied food and medicine to Christians in famine areas and has sold thousands of Christian children--some as young as 6--into slavery.

Accounts of Persecution

I would like to give you some specific examples of persecution against Chinese Protestant Christians.

In some instances persecution can be so violent that it leads to death. For example, on March 27, 1993, 22-year-old Lai Manping was one of five Protestant believers arrested and severely beaten by PSB officials following a raid on a house church meeting in Taoyuan, Shaanxi Province. Lai Manping was suspected of having had contacted foreigners. After repeated beatings, he was then placed in a detention center. Later, officials were worried that Lai Manping was going to die while in their custody, so they released him. While trying to walk home, he collapsed under a tree. A farmer found him and took him to a nearby deserted house. Shortly thereafter he died.

Another case of violent persecution that led to death occurred on January 5, 1994. Protestant believer Zheng Musheng was arrested during a raid on a house church meeting by agents of the Public Security Bureau in the town of Moyan in Hunan Province. According to the local Christians, Zheng was beaten and tortured to death by three PSB officers in an attempt to force him to make a confession. The family later viewed his body and found puncture wounds and rope burns as well as other signs of torture. His widow has boldly made an effort to bring a lawsuit against the PSB officials. This is one case which American businessmen could help by repeatedly raising this case with the Chinese authorities. For if Zheng's widow were to succeed in the lawsuit, this could be one step in the right direction toward holding the government accountable for such brutality.

Just recently, on February 18, 1995, in the city of Huadu in Guangzhou Province, PSB officers raided a house church meeting of more than 100 people. The owner of the house, along with his wife and a church member who tried to intervene, were handcuffed and repeatedly kicked. The officials gathered and burned all the Bibles. And again in February, nine more Christians were arrested in a raid on a house church in Jiangsu Province in eastern China. Once again, PSB officers physically assaulted several of the 500 people attending the unregistered house church meeting. One of the nine was reportedly seriously injured from the beatings inflicted by the officers. At last report, all nine are still being held in a detention center.

During the month of April, as Easter festivities were underway, hundreds of Christians were arrested across China in a renewed crackdown by the government. In Shaanxi Province, in Changzhi, a Protestant house church meeting was raided. Six Chinese Christians were arrested. Among them were two well known house church leaders: Li Tianem from Shanghai and another known as Brother Shi. Also arrested was the famous Chinese surgeon, Dr. Chen Qunying. Many raids and arrests go unreported every week in China. Most of the Christians are fined and released within a day or two. Many others are detained for three months before being fined and released. And then there are those who are considered more dangerous. Lay preachers and key leaders of house churches are sometimes held in detention centers for many years. Under the law, anyone can be detained for up to three years **before** being charged and sentenced. Once they are tried, they may get anywhere from a three to 30 year sentence. This method of detaining people before being tried is becoming more commonly used. The Chinese authorities can easily claim that western human rights groups are exaggerating the number of Christians or political activists. Since records are not often kept on

detainees held under house arrest or in so called "guest houses", it is difficult to document these cases.

Sometimes it is hard to understand how cruel human beings can be to others. Another recent example is that of Li Dexian, a Protestant house church leader. Li was an innocent victim of a raid carried out by PSB agents on a house church meeting on February 18, 1995. A number of agents took turns as they severely beat Li with a steel rod. He sustained fractures to several ribs, and serious injuries to his neck, back and legs. This kind of treatment of Christians is not uncommon. This is just one of many methods used to intimidate and harass non-complying Christians.

One month later, in March, Li once again fell victim to an attack by PSB agents. This incident took place in a province often cited as one of the best examples of economic reform. It took place in the prosperous and successful southern province of Guangdong. PSB agents raided an unregistered house church meeting in the town of Bei Xing. No matter where in China, Protestant house church believers live under constant threat of arrest, beatings and fines.

And it is not just Chinese citizens who are victims. John Short, an Australian Protestant Christian was visiting the house church meeting with Li Dexian at the time of the PSB raid. John witnessed the entire ordeal. He himself was subjected to a grueling interrogation. Then the film in his camera was confiscated and exposed. Mr. Short described how seven uniformed agents had raided a prayer and Bible study meeting that was being held in a private home. The seven agents took two of the house church leaders and stood them against a wall. With their fists, they then punched the foreheads of the two Christians, causing their heads to strike against the wall.

Many people like Li are among those people who work in the factories that make the products that are exported to the United States. Some might argue that they are fortunate to be employed at all. However, being employed is one thing, but employment without dignity is nothing more than enslavement.

We are specifically concerned about the treatment of Christians in some of the so-called "moderate" Islamic countries. Are Christians not terrorized when their churches and homes are bombed? Are Christians not terrorized when their daughters are kidnapped and forced to become Muslims? Are Christians not terrorized when they are unjustly imprisoned for worshipping God in their homes? Are Christians not terrorized when they see their loved ones slaughtered before their eyes? All of these atrocities and more are happening to our brothers and sisters in Christ in nations like Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Sudan. A pledge of international support against terrorism is worthless if these countries aren't willing to tackle terrorism at home.

China Resumes Persecution of Christians

A Hong Kong Christian and businessman has been arrested by the Chinese authorities on charges of "assisting an evil cult." Li Guangquiang, 38, was arrested after being caught trying to deliver 16,000 Bibles to a Christian sect called the "Shouters," a house church movement numbering about 500,000. Li has also been accused of transporting about 17,000 Bibles in April. The Shouters is one among many house church organizations that for decades has refused to join the state-controlled church, therefore labeled as an "evil cult" by the Chinese government. Groups like the Shouters have also been outlawed because of their contacts with western Christians.

Li was arrested in May and indicted in December. Two other Chinese Christians are also being charged in connection with the illegal transporting of the Bibles. The two are Lin Xifu and Yu Zhudi, both who are leaders of the Shouters.

The South China Morning Post (January 8, 2002) reported that President George W. Bush has taken a personal interest in the detention of Li and has ordered US diplomats to take up his case. A spokesman for the U.S. Embassy was quoted as saying, "Reports of a crackdown on religious practitioners in China are deeply troubling. We call upon China as a member of the international community to meet international standards on the freedom of religious expression and freedom of conscience."

In court, in the city of Fu Qing, Li was charged with "using an evil cult to damage a law-based society." The reference to an "evil cult" can result in Li receiving the death sentence.

In another high profile case in China, house church leader Gong Shengliang was arrested and was sentenced to be put to death on January 5. Gong was granted a reprieve from his death sentence after the case attracted attention from human rights groups and U.S. government officials. According to the news agency "Compass," Gong had been given a death sentence in a December 18 secret trial in Hubei province on charges of "complicity in rape" and "leading an evil cult." Gong is the leader of the 50,000 member "South China" house church movement.

International Christian Concern (ICC), a human rights group based in Washington, DC, is urging Christians to call the White House to show support for President Bush's effort to free Li Guangquiang and to encourage the President to be firm in his actions in dealing with the Chinese government on religious persecution issues. The President should also be asked to assure that the death sentence handed down to Gong Shengliang is repealed and that his request for an appeal leads to a fair trial. It should be noted that there is concern that Li and Gong are once again victims of China's harsh polices that result in religious persecution.

More than 400 private homes serving as places of worship for Christians were destroyed in the months of November and December. Not only is the Falun Gong targeted for annihilation and considered a "foreign devil," but Christians also. If a pastor of one these house churches is found without registration, he or she is jailed and his or her home destroyed.

MISSIONARY AND TWO YOUNG SONS KILLED IN INDIA

The Evangelical Fellowship of India reported that an Australian missionary and his two young sons were killed in India by members of a militant Hindu group.
Mr. Graham Stewart Staines, a 58 year old Australian missionary, and his two sons, Philip (age 10) and Timothy (age 8) were asleep inside their vehicle when it was doused with gasoline and set ablaze.
The attack took place in Manoharpur village in the District of Keonjhar in the State of Orissa.
The militants believed to be responsible is the radical Hindu nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The RSS is believed to have been responsible for a number of attacks against Christians and churches in recent months.
Mr. Staines and his wife have been faithfully serving as missionaries with the Evangelical Missionary Society of Mayurbhanj for more than 30 years, working mostly among lepers.
The government reports that 49 people were arrested in connection with the killings and are from Bajrang Dal. Police also have announced a $600 award for help in capturing Dara Singh, a Bajrang Dal leader believed to be behind the attack. The group has in the past been blamed for Hindu-Muslim clashes.
In recent months, pastors and Catholic priests in India have been stripped and paraded naked, Bibles have been burned, churches have been razed to the ground or ransacked and set ablaze, Catholic nuns have been gang-raped and Christian institutions have been attacked. So far, ninety churches have been reported destroyed in recent months.
International Christian Concern is urging the United States government to condemn India's government for not doing enough to end the violence against Christians in India or to provide safeguards for the Christian minority.

Another case of persecution against Christians occurred near Lahore, Pakistan on May 3, 2000 when eight Christians girls were the victims of a cruel and brutal attack. The eight girls were gang raped by four young Muslim men. …It was also learned that the culprits were members of an Islamist extremist group.

The Government of Saudi Arabia is continuing their sweep of Christians by raiding the private homes, confiscating personal articles, and imprisoning men for undetermined reasons.

A recent email from the son of one of the detained Christians reads: "I am a 12 years old boy, together with my 9 years old sister and a 2 month old baby sister, is appealing and begging for your help and support for my father, Dennis Moreno-Lacalle, who had been interrogated last August 29 at 11:15 a.m. by the 3 Government Policemen

(Ministry of Interior of Saudi Arabia). He was asked to lead them in going to our house wherein my mama and my 2 month old baby sister was in the bedroom. Our house was ransacked and one Bible and some musical instruments was confiscated. Please, I'm begging for your help!! We went already to the prison, but these people in the prison keep on passing him on and hiding him. Please, have mercy for us here, because until the time of my papa was taken, me haven't siin and talked to him, even visited him… Please, please help." *Jedidiah John, Saudi Arabia*

Intercessor Report / Prayer Points

January 2002

China - At least three Christians have recently been sentenced to death on charges of cult related activities. Gong Shenliang and Li Ying of the South China Church were sentenced during a secret trial in Hubei province in December. Gong's execution was scheduled for January 5, but was quickly delayed under international pressure so that Gong could appeal. It is widely believed that evidence accusing Gong of "complicity in rape" was abstracted under torture. A Hong Kong business man, Li Guangqiang, was also sentenced to death for delivering Bibles to an outlawed Christian group called the Shouters. Li was arrested in May of 2000 in Fujian province.
Prayer Points: Pray that all three death sentences would be reversed. Ask the Lord to strengthen these believers and give them a vibrant ministry in prison. Pray for God's protection of other Chinese believers whose churches have been mislabeled as cults by the Chinese government.
Haiti - ICC has received disturbing reports that unrest in Haiti has led to violent attacks against Christians. Many pastors have received death threats and many of their homes have been burned or shot at. At least three pastors were briefly jailed for preaching. One Christian, Mr. Ramy Daran, was reportedly set on fire and burned to death. There have also been reports of rape, kidnappings, and people being buried alive.
Prayer Points: Pray that the Spirit of the Lord would prevail over the dark forces active in Haiti and that the light of the Gospel would shine in the midst of the darkness. Ask the Lord to give His children strength and boldness in the face of evil.
Indonesia - Bombs exploded in four Christian churches on New Year's Eve in Palu, the capital of Central Sulawesi. Miraculously only one person was killed even though the churches were full of people. Despite this incident the violence in Sulawesi seems to have subsided for now. However, on the island of Ambon there were several violent attacks on Christian-operated speedboats during the month of December, resulting in at least 16 deaths. Other violent attacks were also reported.
Prayer Points: Thank the Lord for keeping the believers in Palu safe. Pray that the Lord would provide the necessary funds for repairing the church buildings. Also, pray for Christian-Muslim reconciliation in Ambon so that there might be an end to the violence. Pray for the families of those who were killed during December - that God would comfort them and provide for their needs.
Nigeria - The country continues to be plagued by Muslim-Christian violence. At least 5 people were killed in Vwang, near Jos, after a Muslim attack on the Christian community

resulted in a counter-attack against several Muslim villages. Recently a man was also killed in Nigeria for supposedly desecrating a Quran by allowing exhaust fumes from his truck to drift into an open-air Islamic meeting.
Prayer Points: Pray that Nigerian Christians would love their enemies with the love of Christ. Pray that the Muslim and Christian communities could co-exist in peace and tolerance.
Saudi Arabia - Six of the fourteen Christian prisoners jailed in Jeddah, many since July, were released in mid-January and deported. The remaining eight are still detained in very unsanitary conditions, with 1,800 prisoners held in one cell, all prisoners having to rotate in shifts in order to sleep on the floor, and 80% of all the prisoners have contagious illnesses.
Prayer Points: Ask the Lord to strengthen the bodies of those who are suffering physical illness. Pray that the rest of the detained Christians would be released and reunited with their families.
Praise Reports:
Turkmenistan - Shagildy Atakov was unexpectedly released from prison before completing his 4-year sentence. He was happily reunited with his wife and five children. **Praise God for this miraculous release!** Atakov had been imprisoned in 1998 on trumped up swindling charges. He reported being tortured while in detention and was refused medical care on several occasions.
Thanks for your prayers and action.
International Christian Concern

Posted: January 31, 2002

Tacitus (c. 55 -117 CE): Nero's persecution of the Christians

Tacitus was a fierce critic of Nero, and modern scholars have questioned the reliability of his account of this notorious Roman Emperor; but the following passage from his Annals *is famous because it is one of the first mentions in a non-Christian source of Christianity. In 64 CE Rome underwent a catastrophic fire, which some believed had been set at the orders of the emperor himself. Tacitus claims that Nero tried to shift the blame to the unpopular Christians, though other sources indicate that their persecution may have been unconnected to the fire. It is not clear exactly why many Romans so detested the new believers, though Christians were often confused with Jews, who were accused of being rebellious (with some reason, since the Jews of Judaea more than once created insurrections against the Roman provincial government) and lazy (since they rested on the Sabbath). Scandalous rumors about obscene Christian rituals circulated at an early date, and we know that they were accused of disloyalty because of their refusal to perform the token ritual acknowledging the divine status of the Emperor, viewed by most citizens as little different from a modern flag salute. If Tacitus shows sympathy for them, it is because he detests Nero more. Whatever their exact cause this early persecution and later ones made a profound impact on the Christian Church, and bequeathed a legacy of colorful tales of martyred saints who were celebrated in story, song, and art for the next two millenia, long after the Church had triumphed over its opponents.*

What were the main accusations brought against the Christians?

Yet no human effort, no princely largess nor offerings to the gods could make that infamous rumor disappear that Nero had somehow ordered the fire. Therefore, in order to abolish that rumor, Nero falsely accused and executed with the most exquisite punishments those people called Christians, who were infamous for their abominations. The originator of the name, Christ, was executed as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius; and though repressed, this destructive superstition erupted again, not only through Judea, which was the origin of this evil, but also through the city of Rome, to which all that is horrible and shameful floods together and is celebrated. Therefore, first those were seized who admitted their faith, and then, using the information they provided, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much for the crime of burning the city, but for hatred of the human race. And perishing they were additionally made into sports: they were killed by dogs by having the hides of beasts attached to them, or they were nailed to crosses or set aflame, and, when the daylight passed away, they were used as nighttime lamps. Nero gave his own gardens for this spectacle and performed a Circus game, in the habit of a charioteer mixing with the plebs or driving about the race-course. Even though they were clearly guilty and merited being made the most recent example of the consequences of crime, people began to pity these sufferers, because they were consumed not for the public good but on account of the fierceness of one man.

Translated by Richard Hooker

Medieval Sourcebook: Diocletian: Edicts Against The Christians

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There are two authorities for the ten year period of the most intense persecution against the Christians, that itnitiated under Diocletian. Eusebius and Lactantius, were contemporaries and eye-witnesses, the one in Phoenicia and Egypt, and the other in Nicomedia itself. From the two we get many details of the events leading up to the promulgation of the decrees, as well as of the horrors and cruelty attending their execution.

(Hist. Ecc viii 2.) This was the nineteenth year of the reign of Diocletian in Dystrus (which the Romans call March), when the feast of the Saviour's passion was near at hand, and royal edicts were published everywhere, commanding that the churches Should be razed to the ground, the Scriptures destroyed by fire, those who held positions of honor degraded, and the household servants, if they persisted in the Christian profession, be deprived of their liberty.

And such was the first decree against us. But issuing Other decrees not long after, the Emperor commanded that all the rulers of the churches in every place should be first put in prison and afterwards compelled by every device to offer sacrifice.

(Hist Ecc. viii 6.) Then as the first decrees were followed by others commanding that those in prison should be set free, if they would sacrifice, but that those who refused should be tormented with countless tortures; who could again at that time count the multitude of .martyrs throughout each province, and especially throughout Africa and among the race of the Moors, in Thebais and throughout Egypt, from which having already gone into other cities and, provinces, they became illustrious in their martyrdoms.

(De Mart. Pal. ch. 3.) During the second year the war against us increased greatly. Urbanus was then governor of the province and edicts were first issued to him, in which it was commanded that all the people throughout the city should sacrifice and pour out libations to the idols.

(De Mart. Pal. ch. 4.)...For in the second attack upon us by Maximinus, in the third year of the persecution against us edicts of the tyrant were issued for the first time that all the people should offer sacrifice and that the that the rulers of the city should see to this diligently and zealously. Heralds went through the whole city of Caesaream by the orders of the governor, summoning men, women and children to the temples of the idols, and in addition the chiliarchs were calling upon each one by name from a roll.

(De Mart. Pal. ch. 9). All at once decrees of Maximinus again got abroad against everywhere throughout the province. The governors, and in addition the military prefects, incited by edicts, letters and and public ordinances the magistrates, together with generals and the city clerks in all the cities, to fulfill the imperial edicts which commanded that the altars of the idols should be rebuilt with all zeal and that all the men, together with the women and children, even infants at the breast, should offer sacrifice and pour out libations ; and these urged them anxiously, carefully to make the people taste of the sacrifices ; and that the viands in the market should be polluted by

the libations of the sacrifices ; and that watches should be stationed before the baths, so as to defile those who washed in these with the all-abominable sacrifices
from Eusebius: Hist. Ecc., Book VIII, ch. 2, ch. 6 at end, and De Mart. Palest. ch- 3, ch. 4, and ch. 9 (ed. Dindorf, Vol. IV, p. 351, 357, 386, 390, 402). translated in University of Pennsylvania. Dept. of History: *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European history,* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press [1897?-1907?]), Vol 4:, 1, pp. 26-28.

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Clip 1: Facing the flames of persecution, James Jeda was offered a way out: become a Muslim. Would he deny his faith?

Clip 2: Rikka was at a Bible camp when fanatic Muslims attacked. Could she stand strong when her life was threatened?

Clip 3: The Chinese house church service was well underway when the PSB officers raided. What would happen to the group's pastor after the police arrived?

Michael & Margeretta Satler - Michael had been a priest, but left the priesthood after he found there was no Biblical evidence for celibacy. So he left and was married. More than

that, they joined a group called the Anabaptists. The prefix Ana means again. The again-baptizers; more easily said, re-baptizers. The Anabaptists were people who believed that their infant baptism didn't count, because they said it's not found in the Bible; therefore, we need to be re-baptized as adults upon profession of faith. And so they went ahead as adults, having professed faith in Christ, and they baptized one another as part of a little group way back in Germany in 1526. When they were coming back from a little town called Schlicime, they were arrested while walking through the forest and captured and on May 17, 1526, they were tried, and after 1 1/2 hours, the judges came back with this verdict, "Michael Satler shall be committed to the hangman who shall take him to the square and there first cut out his tongue and then chain him to a wagon, tear his body twice with hot tongs and five times more before the gate, then burn his body to powder as an arch-heretic." He was brought to the place, and just before he died, he cried, "Almighty eternal God, thou art the truth, and because I have not been shown to be in error [he had asked if he could debate the point from the Bible, but his prosecutors said "No."], I with thy help on this day testify to the truth and seal it with my blood." With a sack of powder tied around his neck to hasten the death, Satler was thrown into the fire. When the ropes on his hands burned through, the dying man raised his hands in a sign of triumph and prayed, "Father, I commend my spirit into thy hands." His wife was persuaded to recant, but she did not. Eight days later, she was forcibly drowned in the Necar River.

Erwin Lutzer - "The Anabaptist Controversy" (tape: origins of infant baptism)

I Peter 3:13-17

***Don't flinch** (retreat, give up or give in) **even**

in the face of suffering!
Why should you remain firm in the face of suffering?

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

I. You can be considered "<u>BLESSED</u>" (fortunate)! (v. 14)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

II. You can turn your crisis into an opportunity for <u>WITNESS</u> (v. 15)

"Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

III. You can maintain a "<u>GOOD CONSCIENCE</u>" (v. 16a)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

IV. You can be a source of <u>CONVICTION</u> (v. 16b)

Don't flinch in the face of suffering so that:

V. You can fulfill <u>GOD'S WILL</u> (v. 17)