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## CREEPING PERSECUTION ?

Christians are preferred targets of horrific things happening around the world, particularly in Iraq, Syria and where the Islamic State army is on the march in the Middle East. It's also in news from the United Kingdom, Canada, and America. Organizations, schools, corporations, and governments local and national increasingly discriminate against Christians. Our freedom of religion and speech - rights granted by God and affirmed in our Constitution which officials take an oath to uphold - are ignored.

The label "Christian" gets applied to millions of people who passively accept it because they've grown up in an American culture which was historically far more Christ-like than it is today. Many people wear this cultural identification without actually being born-again, Bible-believing followers of Christ. The crosshairs are trained on all who wear the label, but true believers bear the brunt of trouble.

Does this mean you can expect terrorists to suddenly storm your doors and demand you swear allegiance to their hateful intolerant "religion" that demands you convert or die? Not necessarily, yet. Perhaps you find this unthinkable. But here's the reality - "persecution" takes many forms, and creeps in via stages. Think about these five levels in light of your own experience, as well as what's in the news.

**1 - STEREOTYPING** - *promoting selective generalizations about your beliefs...* Dishonest slurs hurt, too, and people try to avoid the slings and barbs of negative words. But many "Christians" so fear any pressure that they actively avoid even this relatively mild stage. They camouflage their beliefs and simply blend in with non-believers around them. Instead of obeying Christ's command by letting His light shine through, they drop under the cover of darkness too. That was easy, so the enemies ramp up.

**2 - VILIFYING** - *consistently portraying you in negative or evil ways...* They declare you intolerant, unloving, un-Christ-like, if you speak against what they have decided is acceptable and preferred. This includes abortion, homosexuality, divorce, and other social rebellions against God's character, that also clearly harm society. But intolerant unreasonable people will not tolerate you, your opinions, or the Bible.

**3 - MARGINALIZING** - *discriminating against you and your beliefs...* They use media, marketing, money and politics. Even when what they say is obviously untrue, you'll pay a price if you do not actively parrot their demands, in school, media, workplace, and the public square. It's not enough to tolerate LGBT etc, you must actively promote it. People who question tenets of secular humanism or "goo-to-you" evolution are labeled unscientific - even though Christians invented "science" and approach all data with carefully framed presuppositions and clear rational logic, as well as faith in God's written revelation.

**4 - CRIMINALIZING** - *making rules against you and your beliefs...* This includes policies, regulations and laws, even in violation of constitutionally protected rights of speech and religion. A teenage girl not allowed to wear a "virginity rocks" t-shirt in school... universities which require campus Christian groups to allow non-believers to be office-holders... government mandating that health insurance providers must pay for contraception and abortion even though it violates their conscience and religious beliefs... and prison or fines for "hate crimes" in Canada and Britain, just for reading or teaching what the Bible says.

**5 - PERSECUTING** - *indirect and direct means of harassment and harm...* Christians face increasing injury, including physical, emotional, mental, and economic, in most aspects of society and culture. For many, promoters of sexual perversion and radical Islam present immediate threats. They impose five choices: leave, give in, convert, die, or fight. Each response involves spiritual warfare.

In Matthew 10:28 Jesus said, ***"Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell."*** In John 8:24 Jesus said, ***"Unless you believe in Me, you will die in your sins."*** In John 15:20 Jesus said, ***"if they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you."*** In John 16:33 Jesus said, ***"I have said these things to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."***

What's the point in being a "cultural Christian"? Make sure you are a TRUE Christ-follower, a born-again believer. Don't be a camouflaged Christian. Live in the POWER of the Holy Spirit. Put on the "armor of God" and let the light of Christ shine through. Show and tell the good news about Jesus. PRAY. Persevere. TRUST and OBEY the Lord, and all WILL be well. No matter what.