

## 1. Persecuted But Not Forsaken (1Q 2026 Christ in Philippians and Colossians)

**Biblical material:** Eph. 3:1; 2 Cor. 4:7–12; Acts 9:16; Philemon 15, 16; Col. 4:9; Phil. 1:1–3; Col. 1:1,2; Phil. 4:4.

### Quotes

- Early Christians survived because stopped their ears to the opinion of the Pagan society all around them. *C.S. Lewis*
- We must not get the impression that the Christian life is one continuous conflict, one unbroken irritating struggle against the world, the flesh and the devil. A thousand times no. A heart that learns to die with Christ soon knows the blessed experience of rising with Him, and all the world's persecutions cannot still the high note of holy joy that springs up in the soul that has become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. *A.W. Tozer*
- If you are going to walk with Jesus Christ, you are going to be opposed. In our days, to be a true Christian is really to become a scandal. *George Whitefield*
- We are all fighting the same enemy. If you read through the Bible, you will find that. Read through the subsequent history of the Christian church, and you will find that God's people in times of persecution have always been driven together and cemented together in a much closer manner than they had ever been at any other time. They are fighting the same common foe, so they draw together. And as Christians... it should have this effect upon us: we are aware of one another, and we draw closer together; our love for one another is increased because of our circumstances. *Martin Lloyd-Jones*
- At times, like the apostle Paul, we will feel hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down (see verses 8–9). However, when we belong to Christ, we can be assured that we will not be crushed, left in despair, forsaken, or destroyed. This should serve as an incredible comfort to us all. *David Jeremiah*
- Your greatest test will be how you handle someone who mishandled you. *Havilah Cunningham*

### Questions

What lessons do we draw from the experience of Paul and his ministry? How do we see the issues in the great controversy working out here? How do we answer the argument that persecution proves a message is true? While we may not have physical persecution, what are the ways we experience persecutions of a different kind?

### Bible summary

In Ephesians 3:1 Paul identifies himself as “a prisoner for you foreigners.” Paul shares the attacks and persecution he has experience (see 2 Corinthians 4:7–12). The Lord told Paul what he would have to suffer (see Acts 9:16). Paul talks about Onesimus to his owner Philemon (see Philemon 15, 16). In Colossians 4:9 Paul says that Onesimus will explain what's happening. Paul identifies himself as the sender of the letter to the church in Philippi (see Philippians 1:1–3). Paul identifies himself as the sender of the letter to the Christians in Colossae (see Colossians 1:1,2). “Always be happy in the Lord—I repeat, Be happy!” Philippians 4:4.

### Comment

The last time we studied Philippians was in 1891. As far as I can tell, we have never studied Colossians! So a study of these books is long overdue...

Doing both books at once does however lead to some complications. We end up jumping around all over the place instead of reading the letter through as Paul had intended. A sequential reading would surely have been preferable. But let's deal with what we have.

The first few texts are not even from the books given us to study. They are there presumably to remind us of the situation in which Paul was writing. He was in prison in Rome, around 60-62AD, and he writes with concern for the churches he is familiar with, urging them to keep to the faith they first accepted, recognizing there would be difficulties and persecution. The letter to the Colossians was delivered by the former slave Onesimus (see the book of Philemon), who gave the church there an account in person of what Paul was going through. Despite his many problems, Paul urges the believers to “be happy!”

So, in what way was Paul “a prisoner for you foreigners”? His desire to take the gospel to the “Gentiles” brought him into conflict with just about everybody—Jewish leaders, and even some within the church (see the Jerusalem Council recorded in Acts 15), the Romans and their deification of the Emperor, and local political authorities (e.g. Ephesus). His preaching of the gospel was turning the world upside-down and many were not happy about it (see for example Acts 19:26: “throughout almost the whole of Asia—this man Paul has convinced and misled many people, telling them that there are no such things as gods made by human hands.”).

Paul then was always facing death threats. “While we live we are always under the threat of death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal bodies. As a result, we are facing death so that you may have life!” 2 Corinthians 4:11, 12. Consequently he “boasts” that “I’ve worked harder, been imprisoned more often, whipped more times than I can count, faced death time and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent twenty-four hours adrift on the ocean. During my many journeys I have faced the dangers of crossing rivers, robber gangs, attacks from my own countrymen, as well as from foreigners. I have faced danger in cities, in the deserts, and on the sea. I have faced the danger of people who pretend to be Christians. I have faced hard labor and struggles, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often going without food, cold, without enough clothing to keep warm. Besides all this, I face the daily concerns of dealing with all the churches.” 2 Corinthians 11:23-28.

But in all of this his dedication to Jesus and the gospel did not waver. He approached this task in the same enthusiastic and vigorous way he had initially persecuted Christians before his conversion.

What an example! None of us have experienced such persecution, yet we may often feel that the world is against us. Our hope and our help is the same that sustained Paul—our experience with Jesus, the risen Lord, and his good news of salvation.

### **Ellen White Comments**

In this dark and trying hour the company of Lystrian believers, who through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas had been converted to the faith of Jesus, remained loyal and true. The unreasoning opposition and cruel persecution by their enemies served only to confirm the faith of these devoted brethren; and now, in the face of danger and scorn, they showed their loyalty by gathering sorrowfully about the form of him whom they believed to be dead.

What was their surprise when in the midst of their lamentations the apostle suddenly lifted up his head and rose to his feet with the praise of God upon his lips. To the believers this unexpected restoration of God’s servant was regarded as a miracle of divine power and seemed to set the signet of Heaven upon their change of belief. They rejoiced with inexpressible gladness and praised God with renewed faith. {AA 184}

The apostles suffered extreme torture because of the painful position in which they were left, but they did not murmur. Instead, in the utter darkness and desolation of the dungeon, they encouraged each other by words of prayer and sang praises to God because they were found worthy to suffer shame for His sake. Their hearts were cheered by a deep and earnest love for the cause of their Redeemer. Paul thought of the persecution he had been instrumental in bringing upon the disciples of Christ, and he rejoiced that his eyes had been opened to see, and his heart to feel, the power of the glorious truths which once he despised. {AA 213-4} Prepared January 1, 2025 © Jonathan Gallagher 2025