

Standing FIRM

**A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOSTILITY
AND PERSECUTION**



Standing FIRM

**A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO HOSTILITY
AND PERSECUTION**

Jesse Yow



Published by Concordia Publishing House
3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118-3968
1-800-325-3040 • www.cph.org

Copyright © 2015 Jesse Yow

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of Concordia Publishing House.

Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible® (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The article “Persecuted for the Faith” on pp. 64–65 is from *The Lutheran Study Bible*, copyright © 2009 by Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The article “Divine Warfare” on pp. 71–73 is from Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua*, Concordia Commentary, copyright © 2004 by Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

The prayers in Appendix 2 are from pp. 532–33 of *Pastoral Care Companion*, copyright © 2007 Concordia Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Cover art: iStockphoto.com; Thinkstock

Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yow, Jesse.

Standing firm : a Christian response to hostility and persecution / Jesse Yow.

pages cm

ISBN 978-0-7586-4921-8

1. Persecution. 2. Violence--Religious aspects--Christianity. 3. Hostility (Psychology) I. Title.

BR1601.3.Y69 2015

272'9--dc23

2015023291

Table of Contents

Foreword	9
Acknowledgments.....	13
Introduction	15
1. What's the Situation?	21
Is It Truly Persecution?	24
Hostility in North America	28
Hostility in Europe	32
Where Christians Have It Worse	35
General Observations.....	45
Discussion Questions	49
2. Theological Understanding of Hostility.....	51
Hostility because of Sin	55
Opposition to Christ.....	60
Article: Persecuted for the Faith	64
Spiritual Warfare.....	65
Article: Divine Warfare.....	71
Examples from Scripture	74
Discussion Questions	96
3. Theological Basis for Christian Response	97
God Works through Us	99
God Uses Our Circumstances.....	103
God Provides Resources.....	109
Response Rooted in the Gospel.....	114
Discussion Questions.....	119

4. Christian Response: Spiritual Disciplines 121

 Prayer 128

 Self-Examination..... 131

 Forgiveness 134

 Bearing Witness..... 137

 Mutual Support..... 139

 Knowing What We Believe 143

 Discussion Questions 146

5. Christian Response: Options for Action..... 147

 Turn the Other Cheek..... 149

 Invoke Our Rights..... 152

 Disengage..... 158

 Play Better Defense..... 162

 Step Up the Proclamation 165

 Make Common Cause..... 169

 Take Our Leave..... 171

 Stay and Endure..... 175

 Discussion Questions 179

6. Gospel-Based Guidance 181

 Centrality of the Gospel 183

 Discussion Questions 185

7. Concluding Thoughts..... 187

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sources of Additional Information..... 191

Appendix 2: Prayers for Those Facing
Hostility and Persecution 201

Appendix 3: Quick Guide to Warnings
and Promises in Scripture..... 207

Foreword

Persecution is a fact of life for millions of Christians across the globe. The most obvious (and horrifying) example is the extermination of Christians and destruction of Arab and African Christian communities in places dominated by groups such as the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and Boko Haram in Nigeria. Even beyond this, amidst more moderate regimes across the Muslim world, Christians (and other non-Muslims) are prohibited from publicly expressing their faith and oftentimes harassed by civil authorities or molested by zealous mobs and individuals. Christians are persecuted not just by Muslim societies though. North Korea routinely arrests Christians and executes pastors. In neighboring China, where the Church is viewed as a threat to the state, it is constantly targeted for intimidation. And the list could go on, but this should not come as a surprise.

Christianity has often been viewed with suspicion and as a threat to the socio-political order. Just two decades after Jesus' ascension, for example, complaints were raised against the apostles and their companions because the message they proclaimed had "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). It certainly did turn the pagan world upside down. To Greeks and Romans, Christians preached "foreign divinities" (Acts 17:18) and acted "against the decrees of Caesar" (Acts 17:7). The Roman historian Tacitus (AD 56–117) wrote that, for such reasons, they were regarded as "a class hated for their abominations." So Nero, the fifth emperor of Rome (AD 54 to AD 68), used them as a scapegoat to blame for the fire that devastated Rome in the summer of 64—a fire he may have ordered himself. An "immense multitude" of Christians were subsequently arrested, convicted, and summarily executed. Some were crucified. Others were wrapped in the pelts of animals and mauled to pieces by wild dogs. Still others were set on fire and used as human lanterns to illuminate the streets of Rome.¹

This was the first but not necessarily the worst of the persecutions in the ancient world. The following two and a half centuries witnessed occasional (and sometimes frequent) outbursts of political and legally mandated violence directed at Christians. It all culminated in the great persecution under

1 Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.

Emperor Diocletian (ruled 284–305) beginning in 303. Bibles as well as places of worship were systematically destroyed. Christians were deprived of their rights and removed from political and military offices. Slaves who had once been legitimately freed were enslaved again. And in many parts, Christians were exterminated—the preferred method being burning the victims alive.

Something remarkable happened, though, in the wake of all this. After Diocletian's resignation from office in 305, the persecution of Christians diminished, and slowly Christianity began to be tolerated. The most famous—though by no means only—official move toward this was the issuing of the Edict of Milan in 313 by Emperor Constantine (ruled 306–337), which protected Christians by law for the first time. Certainly the status of Christians did not change everywhere overnight, but by and large the fourth century marked the beginning of the Christian centuries in the Mediterranean world.

Christianity eventually achieved dominance in the east. The overwhelming majority of the population became Christian; government, politics, and law followed suit. There was little to no distinction between church, state, and society. It took a little longer and certainly a different synthesis was achieved in the west, but by the time of Charlemagne (reigned 768–814), Christian civilization was well established on and beyond the boundaries of the Greco-Roman world. Although a good portion of its land to the east was occupied and its population subjugated under Islam in the seventh and eighth centuries, it persisted through the Middle Ages and into modernity.

The persecution of Christianity outside of western civilization might not come as a surprise. What is entirely surprising is the slow, subtle rise of persecution in the historically Christian, western world that was shaped by Christianity. To be sure, it pales in comparison to what is going on from Morocco to Pakistan, throughout China and elsewhere in the Far East. Nonetheless, it seems the west has entered—and has been in—what some are calling a post-Constantinian age, an age where certainly the privileges and perhaps the protection of orthodox Christianity are no longer legally guaranteed. Some are even suggesting that Christianity may someday soon find itself no longer tolerated.

There are a number of movements advocating for Christianity's marginalization if not its extinction. Author Sam Harris proudly argued for this in his New York Times bestseller, *The End of Faith* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005). Plenty of other influential intellectuals also confess to using their influence to deconstruct Christianity. Richard Rorty (1931–2007), for example, once explained how he used the classrooms of such prestigious institutions as Princeton and Stanford Universities to ridicule Christianity in order to strengthen the case for his own secular philosophy. In his view, Christian perspectives did not even deserve any sort of representation; he did not think they should even be tolerated in educated discourse.²

Opinions like these are certainly alarming, and they greatly contribute to the growing hostility toward Christianity. However, the real persecution Christians will face in the future will be much more formal. It will come from the state, will challenge the Church legally and financially, and will be driven by an ideological secularism. It is already happening. Although it might be temporary, it could—and probably will—grow increasingly worse. Whatever the case, this book will be helpful to navigate the future. *Standing Firm* carefully defines persecution and assesses its various manifestations around the globe before going on to consider the various causes and Christian responses to it. It leaves no stone unturned and covers every conceivable angle. Its author, Dr. Jesse Yow, has done a tremendous service for the Church as it stands poised ready to face the challenges of the foreseeable future.

Dr. Adam S. Francisco
Associate Professor of History and Political Thought
Concordia University Irvine

2 Richard Rorty, "Universality and Truth," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 21–22.

Acknowledgments

Writing a book like this starts slowly but at a deliberate pace, like starting a long cross-country race. As research informs the writing, some of the initial ideas fall by the wayside, other ideas evolve, and yet others grow and ferment. Nevertheless, the race proceeds and finds its own stride. As the Introduction suggests, one question leads to others, and every answer generates its own set of thoughts until the problem becomes one of keeping the scope of work in focus and limited to a manageable size. That is, running the race requires discipline and the ability to stay on the path. And even though the writing may start slowly, the pace quickens as more information comes to light and as thoughts and perspectives mature. By the end, writing moves forward at a furious pace, like a sprint to the finish line. And then it is done, with the satisfaction of having met the challenge!

I could not have finished this race on my own, so I would like to acknowledge the help and influence of several people who encouraged, endured, or supported me along the way. First, I need to humbly acknowledge and thank my wife, Dorcas, for her patience and prayer support. She ran interference and sacrificed her own time and energy to make my time more productive. She also cheered me on and served as a sounding board, always urging me to take a practical rather than abstract approach. Next, I would like to express my deep gratitude to Robert Newton, President of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod’s California-Nevada-Hawaii District, for inspiration and encouragement. Iron sharpens iron, as Proverbs 27:17 so rightly observes, and Bob repeatedly sharpened my thinking. Then I would like to thank the brothers and sisters at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Livermore, California, who encouraged me and prayed for me throughout the race. I would like to highlight my appreciation for Laura Lane at Concordia Publishing House, who entertained the original proposal for writing this book, provided valuable feedback during the writing process, and then turned the draft manuscript into something useful. And finally, I thank and praise God for guiding, compelling, and sustaining me. Truly, He is faithful.

In His service,
Jesse Yow
Soli Deo Gloria!

Introduction

A simple question led to this book: if we Christians encounter hostility or persecution, what can we do besides turn the other cheek? This seemingly simple question gave rise to several more: How do we know if we have run into hostility because we are Christian or because someone is just having a bad day? When does hostility shade into oppression or persecution? Can such things even be happening in the United States? If so, how does our situation in the United States compare with that of Christians in other countries? And, to circle back to the original question, we all know that Jesus told us to turn the other cheek. What does God expect of us, and how would He like to use us in these challenging situations?

On one hand, in Matthew 5:39–41, Jesus states, “I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.” On the other hand, Jesus clearly challenges us to stand firm in the face of difficulties, trials, and opposition. In Mark 13:9, He declares, “But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will **stand** before governors and kings for My sake, to bear witness before them.” The Epistles expand His guidance. For example, 1 Corinthians 16:13 urges us, “Be watchful, **stand firm** in the faith, act like men, be strong,” and Galatians 5:1 urges,

“For freedom Christ has set us free; **stand firm** therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Perhaps most strikingly, Ephesians 6:10–13 adds to our understanding and exhorts,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to **stand** against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to with-
stand in the evil day, and having done all, to **stand firm**.

The image is one of us receiving strength from God to be able to tenaciously submit to His will, glorify His name, and bear witness in all circumstances; this is not the image of a wimp or a doormat!

So when we encounter difficulties, trials, or opposition, what options might we have under the guidance of God’s Word, and what are the implications? Note that we say *when* rather than *if*, and since you have read this far, you probably already suspected as much. This book wrestles with these questions and provides scriptural answers. The scope of such a study holds enough challenges of its own, so we will focus on the questions at hand rather than spending too much time on related topics in current geopolitical events or cultural changes. And even though it is very tempting to veer off into a debate about politics, national policies, or Americanized Christianity, we will save that discussion for another day and another venue. Our focus here is simply to explore that original question and some related derivative questions from a biblical foundation and in the broad context of current challenges.

Hostility and persecution against Christians seem to be growing in the United States and, with a few exceptions, in other countries worldwide. The U.S. has been trending in this direction for years as the nation becomes more secular and as Christianity’s influence on culture and society wanes. Thus, Christians in North America face increasing pressure to keep their faith to themselves—to practice Christianity in private and not speak of

Jesus in public. Such pressure affects churches as well as individuals. It comes through covert or overt censorship, claims that speaking God's Word constitutes hate speech, accusations of hypocrisy and bigotry, and similar forms of hostility. These trends seem to have gone further and perhaps in a slightly different direction in Europe, where Christians face opposition from religious institutions³ and secular organizations alike, and state churches often stand nearly empty as relics from when Christianity thrived.⁴ Even worse, in a wide swath of the rest of the world, Christians face active persecution—including physical abuse, eviction, exile, imprisonment, and even death—because of their faith. Some might assume that conditions have always been this bad, but in fact more Christians are under siege today for their faith than even during the Roman persecution of the Early Church.⁵

What options do Christians have to respond to hostility or persecution, other than turning the other cheek? Such a question may seem speculative, even academic, until you experience hostility because of your faith or until some form of persecution comes to your community. Then the matter becomes personal and timely. Yet the whole matter is already personal and timely because many of our brothers and sisters in the faith face these challenges now. These people are our family in Christ, and we suffer as they suffer.

This book starts with a short overview of varieties of hostility and persecution taking place in North America, Europe, and the rest of the world. The situation is very fluid worldwide, with new developments turning up in reliable news accounts almost every day. Given the magnitude, complexity, and dynamic nature of the issues, we cannot catalog the whole picture nor provide a comprehensive report of political, geopolitical, or religious developments. For that kind of information, use the resources listed in the footnotes and in Appendix 1, and stay abreast of reliable news sources.

Instead of focusing completely on persecution *per se*, we will explore a sampling of recent and current events and see what we can learn from

3 Samuli Siikavirta, "Church of Finland Defrocks Dean Juhana Pohjola," International Lutheran Council, www.ilc-online.org, August 8, 2014.

4 Naftali Bendavid, "Europe's Empty Churches Go on Sale," *The Wall Street Journal*, January 2, 2015.

5 Morgan Lee, "Pope: More Persecuted Christians Today Than Ever Before," *The Christian Post*, July 1, 2014.

their patterns and common threads. Sometimes, the hostility directly confronts the faithful while at other times it is not clear that Christian faith provoked the hostility, so we will consider whether this question is a helpful distinction or just a distraction. Then we will drill down past appearances to explore the nature and roots of hostility against God's people as well as the basis for our response. We will use examples from the Old and New Testaments in our investigations so that we can begin to see how God works in such situations and frame the underlying theological principles. Such an approach will also help us maintain a practical view rather than straying off into abstractions. With this theological foundation in mind, we will next review what God's Word has to say about our approach to the problem, lay out the spiritual disciplines we need as a foundation for our response, and then identify biblical options for passive or active tactics that we can adapt to our situation. Finally, we will outline criteria for making our choices by looking at their implications for Christian witness and the Gospel. In the appendices, we will identify resources for further information, highlight some useful prayers and psalms to set examples for our own prayer life, and list a number of helpful Bible verses for quick reference. For a downloadable Bible study, visit cph.org/standingfirm.

You probably fall into one or more of these groups of readers: (1) those now experiencing hostility; (2) those who would support or encourage the afflicted; (3) those who would counsel, guide, or advise the afflicted; or (4) those who have not yet encountered hostility or paid much attention, but who are maybe looking into the topic for the first time. Regardless of which category might describe you, it is rather easy to talk about something in the abstract, but more difficult and much more useful to consider how it might involve or apply to you. To help you come to grips with hostility before it comes to grips with you, I urge you to consider the discussion questions and points for consideration provided at the end of each chapter. It would be particularly valuable to try to visualize how different situations might look. For example, what would invoking your legal rights actually involve, and what repercussions or difficulties might arise?

What can you do, or what should you do, after you read this book? I pray that you will recognize hostility against Christians for what it is, regardless of appearances; see the needs and opportunities to respond; and understand your options and responsibilities for taking action. Our choices certainly

shape how we support our brethren and how we deal with our own situations, but in the end they dramatically affect our confession of faith. It is not too much to say that our witness to the Gospel of Christ is at stake, so I pray that this book encourages, informs, and challenges you on the path ahead!



1

What's the Situation?

When we think of hostility or persecution directed toward Christians, many of us think of violence or death. We see violence in the headlines, though sometimes the news reports do not tell us that Christians were the target, and often they completely neglect the spiritual dimensions of the conflict. It is a misconception, though, to think that hostility and persecution must always involve bloodshed or death. In North America, hostility and persecution usually take on different forms: bullying, political correctness, censorship, or intimidation. The opposition may be subtle or obvious, and it may be personal and focused or more broadly aimed at entire classes or groups of people. The variety of situations and circumstances, coupled with the lack of extreme violence that we hear about in other parts of the world, can give rise to confusion about whether what we experience is truly opposition or if it has anything to do with our Christianity.

There will always be unanswered questions, but an open-minded review of the past few years of news reports reveals that Christians in the United States and Canada often encounter hostility in many different sectors of life, including in academia, in government, online, and in the workplace. The

hostility may take any of several different forms, and sometimes its appearance can be misleading. Therefore, we may not always understand the situations we encounter or how we should best respond. Recent examples include a variety of instances such as these:

- Gay-rights activists publish the names of people who contribute toward a legislative initiative supporting heterosexual marriage, and people in high-visibility jobs encounter a public smear campaign when their names appear on the list. Christians on the list wonder, *“Is this persecution, or am I being too sensitive? What should I do?”*¹
- Teenage vandals break into a church late one night, overturn the piano, trash a classroom, and turn on a fire hose to flood the floor. Inspecting the damage, the pastor and parishioners wonder if they had been singled out for a hate crime, or if this was just kids “acting out.” *What should they say when interviewed by a local reporter?*²
- Demonstrators invade a worship service, shouting slogans against the pastor and congregation for teaching biblical moral values and speaking of forgiveness from sin. *How should the church handle this hostility?*³
- Secular activists pressure a social media company to block posts that carry a Christian perspective because Christian views are “divisive,” “discriminatory,” and “hate-filled.” Since social media provide platforms for public communication, does such a secular vigilante movement infringe on freedom of speech? Since it does not affect a particular individual or congregation, but only a

1 Declaration of John Doe 2 in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment, *ProtectMarriage.com v. Bowen*, No. 2:09-cv-00058 (E.D. Cal. filed Jan. 15, 2009); (Exhibit A).

2 “Three teenagers arrested for repeatedly vandalizing church,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 14, 1996.

3 “Gay activists disrupt Sunday service at Michigan church,” *Catholic News Agency*, November 13, 2008.

broad class of people, is this kind of censorship even an issue? *If so, how should Christians respond?*⁴

These difficult situations raise questions about the rule of law and civil liberties such as freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion. More significantly, they have implications regarding the credibility of our public witness, opportunities to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and how our antagonists and bystanders perceive Christians and God.

It seems inevitable that Christians, the Church, and the Gospel of Christ will encounter hostility or other negative behavior. In fact, looking back over the past two millennia of Church history, periods of peace were always interrupted sooner or later by times of persecution. Or was it that periods of persecution were punctuated by times of peace? Regardless, hostility should not come as a surprise. After all, our Lord warned in John 15:19, “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” Recall that our Lord came into this world to save it, knowing full well that He would encounter hostility that would climax at the cross. He chose us out of the world, yet leaves us here for a time as His ambassadors, knowing we will encounter hostility as we follow Him. In John 10:14–15, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” We respond in faith, worshipping Him as Romans 12:1 urges: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” He laid down His life for us once for all time; we offer our lives for Him as an ongoing, living sacrifice. This sets the stage for our life as His people.

“Because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:19)

4 Tiffany Owens, “Rocky future for freedom on social media,” *WORLD News Group*, February 28, 2013, and Whitney Williams, “Twitter mutes pro-life group ahead of rally,” *WORLD News Group*, February 14, 2013.

Is It Truly Persecution?

When we do encounter hostility, we need to take a clear-eyed approach to discerning some things about the situation so that we can respond appropriately and correctly rather than react from emotion or false premises. First, if we are blessed to live in a country that values free speech and open exchange of ideas, are we really encountering hostility or is someone just disagreeing with us? Christianity wins in the competition of ideas, but the competition itself can sometimes be bruising. Disagreement is not the same as hostility, opposition, or persecution. Second, have we done something that warrants punishment, such as breaking God's Law as reflected in civil law? First Peter 4:14–15 states, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler." Romans 13:3–4 completes the picture:

For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Scripture clearly warns that we should not be surprised if we suffer for doing something wrong, so we must not think that punishment for crime is the same as persecution.

What if after careful consideration we realize that what is happening to us is more than the competition of ideas on a level playing field, and not prompted by criminal behavior on our part? Then who is it that opposes or shows hostility toward Christians? Are they individuals, a group of some sort, or an organization? Are they hostile only toward Christians, or toward those in other religions as well? Finally, does our situation involve random, one-of-a-kind events such as robbery or vandalism, or is it systematic, repeated, or pervasive? Is the hostility driven by ideology or belief systems, or does it reflect some other cause, such as greed, fear, or some kind of honest misunderstanding?

The questions framed above provide filters to help discern if our circumstances actually reflect hostility toward Christians or the Church—a hostility that attempts to block the Gospel of Christ—or if it is something else. Their answers affect our options for response, and possibly whether we need to respond at all. This scrutiny in no way denies or diminishes the reality of hostility targeting Christians, but it does help our understanding. We do not want to be guilty of crying wolf when there is no wolf of persecution at the door. On the other hand, if the wolf really is at the door, we need to sound the alert and think through how we will respond.

Scripture makes it clear that God's people, sanctified and secure in God's grace, are also dispersed as ambassadors of the Gospel according to His will.⁵ In other words, God deliberately places Christians where He wants them to witness, minister, and serve. Therefore, our individual situations are not accidental, random events. We should not be taken by surprise when we run into hostility but should look at our circumstances as opportunities to stand together, draw closer to God, and point a fallen world toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And we should know that God has placed us there, rather than assuming that our difficult situation has somehow escaped His notice.

Living in this reality, we can expect that Christians, the Church, and the Gospel will rarely encounter neutrality, but will often run into a variety of negative behaviors. We can sort these behaviors into different levels to help sketch out the problem, establish a common understanding of different types of behavior, and provide a basis for discernment to help avoid overreacting or underreacting as we respond.

Hostility, opposition, and persecution are not tidy, discrete categories, because they are somewhat overlapping terms. They represent shades of gray, ranging from thoughts to words to deeds, based on how the hostility is expressed and perhaps reflecting the goal or intent of the hostile behavior. The shades of gray, then, may begin with some degree of indifference or *apathy* toward Christians, the Church, or the Gospel. As *hostility* begins to arise, Christians may become targets of negative behavior expressed

5 First Peter 1:1 describes Christians as “elect exiles of the Dispersion.” The Greek root word for “Dispersion,” *diaspora*, is also the root for our word *spore*. *Spore* points to our role as seeds, moved by God's Spirit to wherever He wills, and *elect* emphasizes that we are chosen and placed according to God's sovereign purpose.

by written or spoken words in public settings, such as community functions, legal proceedings, or government processes. This level of behavior might best be described as a form of bullying. As hostility grades into **opposition**, though, Christians may encounter attempts to intimidate, stop, or block their witness or civil freedoms of speech, assembly, or religion. This could include activity (e.g., threats, slander, libel, or violence) intended to marginalize, eliminate, or delegitimize the Christian message. As hostility transitions into *persecution*, Christians will face attempts to eliminate their witness or freedoms of speech, assembly, or religion. Opponents will seek out or pursue Christians with such attacks and will try to keep Christians on the defensive in an attempt to prevent any proactive response. This will probably include activity (including intimidation or violence) intended not only to stop the Gospel message but also to marginalize, dehumanize, or eliminate Christians themselves.

As hostility and opposition intensify, the behavior becomes more personal, more active, and more aimed at eliminating Christians along with their confession of God's Word. Note also that we are describing behaviors based on their opposition to Christians and God's Word without any explicit mention of underlying motivations. This will help avoid tangential and potentially unhelpful arguments about whether bullying or other bad behavior is or is not hostility against Christians. It is important to realize that the practical effects of hostility are to impede or stop Christian witness to or confession of the Gospel regardless of whether that is the apparent or claimed reason for the opposition. In fact, hostility may seem to arise from any of several different factors. For example, consider the opposition that arose in Acts 19:23–41, which relates,

About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. And there is danger not only

that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

Was this opposition to Christianity driven by economic, religious,