

Martyrs

- I. martyr: *Eccl.* The specific designation of honour (connoting the highest degree of saintship) for: One who voluntarily undergoes the penalty of death for refusing to renounce the Christian faith or any article of it, for perseverance in any Christian virtue, or for obedience to any law or command of the Church.
- A. Forms of *martyr* are found only in **ACT 22:20; REV 2:13; REV 17:6.**
 - B. *Martyr* translates the Greek word *martus* (Strong's G3144), which means *witness* and is so translated in 29 places.
 - C. A small distinction exists between being *involuntarily* slain for the faith (as Abel, **IJO 3:12**) and *voluntarily surrendering* one's life for the faith, as Christ or Stephen. **JOH 10:17-18; ACT 22:20.**
 - D. However, anyone whose mind would not be moved from his faith and died at the hands of another because of that faith, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, is accepted by God as an *overcomer*. **REV 12:11.**
- II. The term *martyr* has been mainstreamed as meaning “anyone who dies for what he believes in” or “anyone who dies for a good cause.” Consider the popular phrase, “He was a martyr for a good cause.”
- A. We commonly hear of Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or even Communist martyrs, but are these all the same as a Christian martyr?
 - B. For many, *martyr* has become a synonym for a zealous fanatic of any cause who is willing to die for that cause whether it is religious, political, racial or economic, and whether that person does so as an aggressor, defender or victim.
 - C. This study intends to show that genuine Christian martyrdom is not the same as others, and whereas not violating conscience is very important, the giving of one's life for conscience sake is not the sole determiner of the honor of such an action.
 - D. There are today in some parts of the world Christians who suffer intense religious persecution and genuine Christian martyrs who died for no other reason than their belief that Jesus Christ is their living God and Lord of their lives.
 1. They have no particular political agenda nor hatred of unbelievers, and are generally peace-loving, trustworthy acquaintances of all men.
 2. The numbers of their martyrs are greater than those of other religions or causes.
- III. Muslims who blow themselves up in suicide bombings may do so out of a heartfelt belief in their system of religion.
- A. They may do so with bravery and a clear conscience. But remember that Paul was a heavy persecutor with a clear conscience before his conversion. **ACT 23:1; 26:9-11.**
 - B. The slaying of innocents in the name of a delusion does not justify it. **1TI 1:13.**
 - C. A suicide bomber is not a martyr by any stretch.
 1. He is choosing his own death without coercion and actively pursuing it.
 2. He is not dying because he refuses to convert from his own religion; he is dying because others do not convert to his religion.
- IV. Polytheistic religions are less likely to produce martyrs because of the very nature of polytheism.
- A. Their open-minded superstition might rather incorporate another belief system into its pantheon of deities and beliefs. To a limited extent, they are tolerant.
 - B. In India today, Hindus are known to add Jesus Christ to their religious festivals and

pantheon of deities (though they would not recognize Him as the unique Creator, Savior and Judge).

1. This kind of open-minded superstition was what Paul challenged in **ACT 17:16-23**.
2. Pauline Christianity (the full implication of Jesus Christ as Lord) is one religion that idolaters would rather fight than tolerate. **ACT 19:17-35**.

C. Some Buddhists and Hindus have submitted to death rather than convert from their religions.

1. Tibetan Buddhists have been persecuted unto death for refusal to convert to atheistic communism.
2. Hindus have likewise suffered for refusing to convert to Islamic monotheism.

D. Religion is not always the only factor in such persecution.

1. In the Muslim/Hindu conflict, the nationalistic animosity between the Pakistanis and the Indians is a big factor.
2. In the Tibetan Buddhist/Chinese Communist conflict, the issue is as much about self-government and independence versus centralized government as it is about religion.

E. Mind that genuine Christianity has no interest in earthly kingdoms (**JOH 18:36**) and seeks to only prepare all men for the Judgment Seat of the heavenly kingdom. **ACT 17:30-31**.

V. Assuming that Hindu and Buddhist “martyrs” die for conscience sake, what makes their deaths differ from the genuine Christian who dies for conscience sake concerning Jesus Christ?

- A. An obvious distinction is that the H or B dies for a delusion but the Christian dies for the truth which is supported by eyewitness accounts of the resurrected Jesus Christ Who perfectly fulfilled the prophecies of Himself made for thousands of years before His arrival and Whose prophecies continue to be fulfilled throughout post-ascension history.
- B. Why was the H or B targeted? Was it strictly for the spiritual tenets of his belief system or were there other factors involved?
 1. Was he engaged in violent or revolutionary political activities?
 2. If so, then he is not truly dying as a martyr but moreso as an *enemy combatant*.
- C. Sometimes innocent bystanders die in such political conflicts, in which case their deaths are not martyrdom in religious sense but rather *war casualties* or *genocide*.
- D. The killing of non-Christians simply because of their religious beliefs (and their unwillingness to convert away from them) is rare. By contrast, it is estimated that in the Sudan alone, hundreds of thousands of Christians have been slain simply for their refusal to renounce their Christian faith.

VI. Since the resurrection of Christ, Christians have suffered martyrdom at the hands of Jews, Romans, Huns, Goths, Vikings, Muslims, Hindus, etc., and the Catholic Church has a bloody track record of its own.

- A. The majority of Christian martyrs were not revolutionaries or political dissidents but ordinary folk.
- B. In following the teachings of their Lord, they sought to live peaceably with all men (**ROM 12:18**), love their neighbors and have an honest conversation (**ROM 13:9; 1PE 2:12**), submitting to civil authority (**1PE 2:13-17**) and pay their taxes (**MAT 22:21**).
- C. In general, they gave no cause for offense, yet they have suffered more persecution and martyrdom for their faith than other religions. Why?

VII. Biblical Christianity is a lightning-rod to natural man's wrath against God and His ways.

- A. It is hated because of its exposure of what men are really all about. **JOH 3:19.**
- B. It is hated because it declares judgment after death and final judgment according to man's works. **HEB 9:27; REV 20:12-13.**
- C. It is hated because it declares all men under sin and incapable of satisfying the demands of a holy God for righteousness. **ROM 3:9-20; EPH 2:1.**
- D. It is hated because of its exclusivity.
 - 1. It forbids any other god.
 - 2. It declares that Jesus Christ is the sole salvation of sinners. **ACT 4:12.**
 - 3. It declares that none can approach God but through Jesus Christ. **JOH 14:6.**
 - 4. It declares that God must be worshipped in an exclusive manner. **JOH 4:23-24.**
 - 5. It forbids the commingling of any other religion. **2CO 6:14-18.**
 - 6. Its textbook (the Bible) is the sole true revelation. **PSA 119:128; 1JO 4:6.**
- E. It is preeminently despised because of Jesus Christ, Whom it holds to be the Creator, Savior and Judge of mankind to Whom all men must answer. **ACT 17:31.**
 - 1. Because the world hates Him, it hates His followers. **JOH 15:18-20.**
 - 2. The general rule is that the harmless ends up being the harmed. **GAL 4:29.**

VIII. Because of His example and resurrection, Christians not only know what to expect but also how to react to persecution. **1PE 2:21-24; LUK 23:34; ACT 7:60; ROM 8:18.**