It is estimated that there are approximately 2.2 billion Christians in the world today. Sadly, it is also estimated that as many as 100 million of those Christians are physically threatened or openly persecuted – that is almost 1/3 of the total population of the U.S. Most of the persecuted Christians live in countries such as Indonesia, India, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iraq. In those countries and many others like them, if you have converted from Islam to Christianity, they may not only kill you, but your entire family as well. Hundreds are executed every year simply for claiming to follow Jesus. Much milder forms of persecution exist even more widespread than death. Christians are routinely not allowed to build churches, own Bibles, obtain jobs; they’re often blackmailed, robbed, expelled from their community, and abducted, never to be seen again.

And guess where Jesus’ church is growing the fastest – where it is persecuted the most. I find I must ask myself, what does it mean for ME to suffer for Jesus? When Paul says in Romans 8:17 if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. In this country we don’t know what it TRULY means to physically suffer for Jesus. Our suffering is much more subtle. It comes from people rejecting us, ridiculing us, turning their backs on us, getting angry at us. That has caused me to wonder - if I’m not getting that kind of treatment from some people, should I be trying harder to share Jesus with others? Just a thought.

Paul was beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, suffered whippings and at least one stoning, and amazingly he counted it joy to suffer for Jesus. Look what he says in Romans 8:18-21

18 Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. 19 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. 20 Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. But with eager hope, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

We are ALL, us Christ-followers, wealthy beyond our wildest dreams – we are, as God’s adopted children, inheriting God’s glory! Hallelujah!!! And the cost for this glory we’re going to get? It’s already been paid for by Jesus! So any cost that we incur, such as a little minor suffering, is NOT “fourteen low, low payments of only…”; its NOT “next to nothing”, Paul says is “IS nothing!” What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. A more literal translation of “the glory he will reveal to us later” is - “the glory of God that is certainly about to be revealed in us.” Do you see the urgency, the imminence? God’s glory is coming to us, it’s on its way, it’s just a matter of time and that time may be short! We currently live in a time of
suffering, but the time of GLORY will be here soon. Of course, that could be tomorrow or a thousand years from now, but as far as God is concerned, it’s almost here!

We must remember that Paul is writing to the church in Rome. By the time he was writing this letter, Roman Christians were already being persecuted for their faith in Jesus. They were harassed, deported, jailed and even executed. And in the midst of it all, they were looking forward to the glory that awaited them in Heaven.

This coming promised glory will not only revealed to us, but will transform us in ways that we, as mortal humans, can’t begin to understand. Paul attempts to describe what will happen to us in 1 Corinthians 15:53-56 *Our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.*

54 Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

56 For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power.

57 But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jesus returns and we are all in Heaven, God’s glory will literally shine through us (it’s never our glory, it’s always God’s glory that we will be in possession of.) But what is God’s “glory?” A definition of “glory” is “a quality or qualities possessed by a person or thing that “shines” or has “great weight.” Glory is difficult to describe. For me to attempt to describe God’s glory, it would be everything wonderful, amazing, beautiful, incredible, fearful, awesome, powerful, not understandable, and filled with love, grace and mercy.

To honor someone, God for instance, is to show the highest respect possible; we honor God in His glory. God is the only one who truly possesses what we could imagine as glory. To “glorify” or “give glory to” is actually honoring, recognizing and praising the One who already possesses glory. It is not giving to God something that he doesn’t have, but to recognize, to give honor to what He DOES have. I believe we often misuse this concept by saying, “let’s give glory to God.” We can’t. It’s not ours to give. We are to honor and praise Him for the glory that IS God. This, incidentally, is a major theme of Romans – honoring and recognizing God as GOD, praising Him just for WHO He is, thanking Him for all He has done, is doing and will do in, through and for us!

Interestingly, to honor someone is to understand that’s where your main focus in life is! Sadly, in this culture, we have it all backwards. Do we glorify (honor, or have our main focus of life fixed upon) **violence or peacemaking?** Well, of course we Christ-followers would obviously say we honor “peacemaking.” Really? The world doesn’t. Just open the newspaper, watch the news, watch a web-broadcast of the news. All you SEE is violence. Do we, in this culture praise and honor God or human power and
accomplishments? Watch the news. Do we honor the rich and famous, or the righteous, humble and faithful? Pick up a magazine, watch television, read a newspaper. Yes, our culture has its sight firmly set on the “dead things.”

We need to understand that the ancient Roman society was what is known as an “honor/shame” society. The people that they thought possessed glory, (the high elected officials, the wealthy, basically the rich and famous,) those people MUST receive honor – it was considered a disgrace NOT to. Hence, “honor/shame.” Again, this causes me to examine my own life. Is my entire life devoted to recognizing God as “GOD”; honoring Him with my words, my time, my thoughts and actions, my finances; praising Him for WHO He is, thanking Him just because He is God? I believe anything short of that would be “shame.” To recognize God’s glory is to see and honor the perfection of His goodness, His saving grace, His magnificence and power! You might remember what Paul said in Romans 6:4 Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father. Raising Jesus from the dead “demonstrates” God’s glory. “Glory” describes Jesus’ new body – AND our ultimate new body! In trying to find the right words to describe “glory” I just come back to this thought – “it’s WHO God is!”

Paul then goes on in Romans 8 with this rather unusual statement in verses 19-20: All creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse. All creation is cursed. That’s talking about everything on this planet that is not human. Wow! When Adam and Eve sinned, they were thrown out of Eden. IN Eden everything was eternal. Outside of Eden everything began to suffer “death and decay.” When they “chose” to go against God, it brought death not just to all humankind, but ALL of creation.

And did you notice Paul used the phrase “against its will”? The plants, the animals, even the planets and stars, none of them sinned. They all fell under the curse of God brought about by sin becoming active in this world, thanks to Adam. Look what God told Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28-30 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so. Everything on earth was blessed by God – until Adam sinned. And in Genesis 3:17 we see the result of that sin: Cursed is the ground because of you

I don’t know about you, but I find it amazing that ALL of creation is aware of WHO God is. All creation “honors” the glory of God. And we humans “honor” Putin, Kardashian, Trump and Clinton. Boy do WE have it wrong. Creation itself suffers
emptiness, futility, purposelessness. Creation suffers because the first human beings foolishly refused to live in dependence on God. They wanted life “their” way, and God gave them what they wanted.

THANKFULLY Paul goes on - *But with eager hope*, 21 the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay. It’s interesting that creation has had the future hope (that joyful expectation of what it knows is coming) all along! Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:27 he “has put everything under his feet” Jesus is the future hope of ALL creation, not just humans. The very rocks, hills, trees, plants and animals all look with joyful expectation to the day when “death and decay” are done away with, thanks to Jesus! All creation, literally, eagerly waits for the time when God’s children are fully returned to the image of God. At that time, all creation will be fully restored to the Creator’s original design. A new heaven and a new earth – all will be well for eternity.

When we accept Christ as our Savior, we are given a brand new, a **changed** life. As we “live” in Christ, we are to be in the process of living a “**changing**” life. In the end, all of creation will be **permanently, gloriously changed**, all reflecting GOD’S perfect glory!

As a take home thought from this, I find I must ask myself: Am I daily shining for Jesus in the dead and dying world around me?