

Religious Persecution

(Is it Real?)

There seems to be a prevalent concern among those who profess Christianity as to how the changing course of society will affect their daily lives. Many have expressed a concern that, whereas not many years ago, there was a concept of mind that the United States of America was a Christian Nation (whether that had been so or not is not the intent of this article). Nevertheless, there is a great concern over what many perceive to be an agenda, of almost all organizations and/or philosophies, to persecute Christians. Whether history will remember it as such, history alone will tell, but there appears to be a change in the wind regarding the world's attitude toward those who profess to follow Christ. Many believe that other religions are allowed to do things that Christians are not, and that Christians are being forced to either participate in the moral decay of the society, or be forced "out of business," or may even be subject to imprisonment. I do not know if persecution would be the proper label, but what I have seen is that those who profess Christianity have conformed to the world to such a degree, that they have brought upon themselves the present concerns.

Nevertheless, in reading a preface to the writings of Fox's book of Martyrs (First published in 1563, and published by the John Winston Company in 1926), the following statement was made, of which all Christians, in every era, might want to be aware: "In all ages, we find that a disposition to persecute for opinion's sake, has been manifested by wicked men, whatever may have been their opinions or sentiments on religious subjects. The intolerant Jew, and the bigoted pagan have exhibited no more of a persecuting spirit, than the nominal professor of Christianity, and the infidel and the avowed atheist. Indeed, it seems to be an "inherent vice," in unsanctified nature to endeavor by the pressure of physical force, to restrain obnoxious sentiments, and to propagate favorite opinions. It is only when the heart has been renewed and sanctified by divine grace, that men have rightly understood and practiced the true principles of toleration. We do not say that none but real Christians have adopted correct views respecting civil and religious liberty;—but we affirm that these views owe their origin entirely to Christianity and its genuine disciples."

The point of the quote is to emphasize a statement made by the Apostle Paul to a young evangelist named Timothy, concerning those who would live godly, saying, "But thou didst follow my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience, persecutions, sufferings; what things befell me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: and out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecutions" (2 Timothy 3:10-12). What the Apostle Paul

indicates is that it doesn't matter in what era you live, if you are living godly you will suffer persecutions. Maybe, just maybe, the reason that persecutions have been minimal in the United States is because the masses are professing Christianity in name only: James said, "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4:4).

When the Lord spoke to the apostles on the night in which he was betrayed, he said them, "If the world hateth you, ye know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also" (John 15:18-20). Maybe there's a reason there hasn't been widespread persecution: Christians will not be loved by the world, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16).

Consider the words of the Apostle Paul, saying, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? Or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what portion hath a believer with the unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? For we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore, Come you out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). You see, God does not expect the Christian to get along with the world, but rather, "become blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye are seen as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (Philippians 2:15-16).