

Persecution Grows the Church?



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In the Church we have this idea that persecution will result in the growth of the church. And most in modern christianity have chosen NOT to engage in the political arena despite the ungodly laws being put in place and are longingly looking forward to the affliction to come. So in this brief study we are going to look at if in fact such assertions are true, by investigating what the Bible says in regards to this matter.

The first place we will begin from is by examining what the Lord Himself said, “**And you will be hated by all on account of My name;** but the one having endured to the end, he will be saved. And **whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next.**” Matthew 10:22-23. Here, it is very clear the Lord’s advice in terms of persecution is to flee to the next city. And there is evidence of such actions being taken by the early church throughout the book of Acts. Now, there are two main aspects to persecutions, the first is in terms of those from among the public that are at odds with the message which is related to us in the many places where Paul went to preach the Gospel. Such as Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippians, Thessalonica, Berea, Ephesus, and many other places. All of whom the public were rallied to act in most cases by the opposition of the Jews who perceived this new faith to be contradictory to their own. The Second type is in respect to government organised persecution at the point when the message of Christianity has reached saturation point, so they engage to imprison and even to kill with the backing of the law of the land, as we see Paul doing going from city to city with a letter given to him in full authority to imprison those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. [Acts 9:1-2]

And this is the final stage, the Lord said, “**And whoever will not receive you nor will hear your words, shake off the dust of your feet going forth out of that house or that city!** Truly I say to you, on the day of judgement, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and of Gomorrah than for that city.” Matthew 10:14-15 The point is to show the detrimental effect of persecution has when it

comes in a form of an organised manner, not a mere act of mocking and ostracization by society but specific steps taken to hinder and silence as an example of those having fully heard and have chosen to reject. The main point in both instances is that persecution did not help the inhabitants of those cities, because the workers of the field were sent away from the harvest of that nation.

And we have as example the persecution that arose following the murder of Stephen, Luke states, “And on that day **a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem**, and all except the apostles **were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.**” Acts 8:1. The result of which was that the inhabitants of Samaria heard the Good News. This same persecution also drove the workers to Antioch, “So indeed those **having been scattered by the tribulation having taken place over Stephen** passed through to **Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch**, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone. But some of them **were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who having come into Antioch**, were speaking also **to the Hellenists, proclaiming the gospel— the Lord Jesus.**” Acts 11:19-20. Persecution forced the spread of the Gospel beyond the borders of Judea, meaning Israel’s loss was another’s gain. And Judea at that time was described as, “**Saul was destroying the church.** Entering houses after houses and dragging off men and women, **he was delivering them to prison.**” Acts 8:3. Until the Lord Himself had to intervene, saying “**Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?**” Acts 9:3. Meaning through persecution Judea was reduced in the faith.

This organised persecution did not diminish, but built up momentum when Herod sought to join in driving the Apostles themselves into hiding. In Acts 12 he killed James the brother of John and imprisoned Peter, and it is through God’s intervention that the apostle to the Jews escaped jail and was sent away most likely to Babylon to reach the remnant of Jews that did not return to Jerusalem in the Time of Cyrus. [1 Peter 5:13] Finally, it reached the breaking point when they sent away Paul in chains to Rome after he proclaimed his testimony in Jerusalem, which was the last recorded attempt to reach the inhabitants of Judea before its utter destruction in 70 AD. The lesson for us is that, when persecution has reached an organised form to be regulated by the law of the land then we have reached the precipice. And if something is not done to resist by engaging in a lawful manner through political means to protect this whisper of a concept of free speech then we are already on a downward trajectory to the detriment of the inhabitants of that land. And we are seeing a growing trend of political and judicial weaponization in Europe in the persecution of Christians and christian morals where the Church has been fast asleep, mostly due to the wrongful desire to be counted as a friend to the world.

So the point is that even though persecution serves to expand Christianity beyond the limits of the confine it exists in, it hardly serves the inhabitants of that land. However God does use the effect of persecution as a refining fire in order to remove dross from our lives and build the genuineness of our faith. [2 Cor. 1:8-10] As the Lord says, “I will bring the **one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested.**” Zechariah 13:9 This is to just point out the purpose persecution serves in the body of Christ as mentioned in James 1:2-4, and 1 Peter 1:6-7, 4:12-15.

Now, we will examine the historic persecutions of Christians, to see if indeed it served to grow the Church in that land. If you consider North Africa and the Middle East, especially modern day Turkey which were once a thriving ground of the Christian faith, no longer are. The persecuting force that came in the form of Islamic faith had successfully, silenced, suffocated and driven out the Christian population. These once strongholds of the faith were held in confinement unable to share the gospel at the pain of imprisonment and even death through the Law of the Land. The result of which has been

evident for more than a millennia. So, organised persecution DID NOT bring Growth to the church, it stifled it. To this we can add, North Korea, Russia and China which through the communist revolution had successfully stifled Christianity for nearly a century, in the imprisonment and murder of the faithful. The only time a breakthrough was obtained was at the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain for Russia, and the economical revival of China through engagement with the West making way for Christianity to once again return by some measure.

If persecution was not an effective means the devil would not have bothered to do it. Paul when he first preached to the Thessalonians was unable to rest, fearing Satan by the power of persecution may have silenced their faith and he wrote, “And indeed, when we were with you, we were telling you beforehand that **we are about to suffer affliction**, just as also it came to pass, and you know. **Because of this I also, enduring no longer, sent in order to know your faith**, lest somehow **the one tempting had tempted you, and our labour would be in vain.**” 1 Thess. 3:4-5. The main point is persecution is not a means of multiplication in the place of its origin, it is a weapon of the enemy in order to suffocate the Church of growth. However in time of peace the Gospel grows and flourishes, as Luke recorded, at the time of Paul’s conversion saying, “**Then indeed the churches throughout all of Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace**, being edified. And **going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied.**” Acts 9:31

Now in contrast let us consider the United States, a nation that was birthed out of Christians fleeing religious persecution and seeking to establish a nation where religious freedom is a fundamental aspect of Government. Plymouth Rock, where the pilgrims made a covenant with God to establish a nation based on Godly principles the result of which is evident to this very day. The US has been a beacon for Christianity ever since, while Europe has become stagnant and dwindling in religious constraints and persecution, where Atheism is honoured and the Christian faith and its illustrious heritage is being systematically cast out, even in favour of Islam.

So while the United States continues to produce generals for the faith, Europe has been counting down. The point is peace from religious persecution has enabled the US to spread the Gospel to the rest of the world. Yet Christians in the US nowadays are nonchalant about this precious religious freedom, which is enshrined in Free Speech, and are not willing to engage in Political matters even to protect this fundamental right. They fail to envision, failure to protect Free Speech means failure to uphold every other Christian morals. The UK now has exclusion zones for abortion clinics where no Christian can be found speaking the word Abortion in the exclusion vicinity or being engaged in prayer at the pain of the full persecution of the Law. So through the Law of the Land, they have managed to stifle every effort to save life, because the Church has slept right through it.

So it is JUST bravado to say such things as Persecution will grow the Church. No, it won't, there is NO Evidence for that, in fact it is the grounds on which many will turn on one another to betray. [Matthew 24:10] So Paul instructs us saying, “First of all, therefore, **I exhort entreaties, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, to be made on behalf of all men for kings and all those being in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.** This is good and acceptable before God our Saviour, **who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**” 1 Timothy 2:1-4 That is we should be engaged so that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ may be preached unhindered and ALL may hear it. The main hindrance in the Middle East and North Korea and even China is that the gospel cannot be preached openly and freely so that many are not able to hear it. God does wonders but He asks us to engage in prayer in order to produce a peaceful environment in which the gospel can be preached. So voting for religious freedom

in upholding free speech is a necessary aspect of that process. So staying silent when the enemy is preparing the ground to stifle the voice of Christianity is not ground to expect growth. COVID Laws was a means that was used to stifle the Christian faith, it had succeeded by some measure since tens of thousands of churches were forced to shut their doors permanently.

The main point is to resist before ungodly laws become the Law of the Land. Do not be mistaken we are engaged in a cosmic spiritual battle, the enemy is seeking to control the speech of people in order to restrain and silence and this is not just for a mere purpose of controlling people. NO, his ONE and ONLY objective is to STOP the Gospel from being preached Freely, he cares for NOTHING else. So do not be mistaken to think you can abstain, your very religious freedom is what is at stake, so silence on such a day is a VOTE for the other side, the enemy prospers when men are asleep. [Matthew 13:25] All other Christian activities, such as life saving teaching addressing the issue of abortion, ALL STANDS ON THIS GROUND of RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND FREE SPEECH without which every effort you put forward to save life will be deemed unlawful.

The history of the church is littered with godly men and women being engaged in the Law of the Land in order to protect and fan the flame of the Faith. Martin Luther was protected by nobles of the court of the king in order to advance the reformation. John Knox battled to keep the protestant movement going, being engaged in the affairs of state. People had to FIGHT in every arena in the courts of kings and queens to promote this new revelation and to get out of the oppressive system. Likewise, we are also required to engage in the democratic system in order to sustain our religious freedom and to contend for Christian values.