

9. You will suffer persecution

May 2, 2010

- Recently the United States Army has withdrawn an invitation to evangelist Franklin Graham to speak at a special Pentagon prayer service next month because of his controversial views on Islam which he pointed out as an evil religion.
- April 15, 2010 – A U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb in Wisconsin ruled the National Day of Prayer unconstitutional.
- April 14, 2009 – According to Secretary Janet Napolitano of The Department of Homeland Security, she declared that the returning veterans possess combat skills and experience that are attractive to rightwing extremists who uphold the Second Amendment to bear arms. Among the rightwing extremists, anyone who is for pro-life legislation, limited government, legal versus illegal immigration and fundamentalist Christians are potential domestic terrorist threats.
I guess all of you are domestic terrorists in Napolitano's mind.
- June 28, 2006 – Senator Obama said, "Whatever we once were, we are no longer a Christian nation -- at least not just -- we are also a Jewish nation, a Muslim nation, a Buddhist nation, a Hindu nation, and a nation of non-believers."
You were wrong again, Mr. President. Whether you'd like to admit it or not, 84 percent of Americans still consider themselves Christians. Last time when I checked 84% is quite a majority.

Ever since President Obama and his extreme liberal Democrats got the Executive Branch and the Congress, the threats against Christians are winked at, and even highly encouraged by some government agencies and the lame stream media. So we consider we are under persecutions.

However, listen to this:

- April 11, 2010 – Officers from the Ministry of Information of Iran arrested and imprisoned 19-year-old Daniel Shahri, a Christian indefinitely in Isfahan, Iran.
- April 13, 2010 – Pastor Ishaku Kadah and his wife in Boto village, Bauchi state, Nigeria, were abducted from their home and killed by suspected Islamic extremists. Their burned bodies were discovered hours after their abduction.
- April 14, 2010 – Plain-clothes officers from the Ministry of Information arrested a house church pastor and 10 other men in Karaj, Iran. They were having a Bible study at his house. Pastor Irani was reportedly assaulted and then transported to an undisclosed location.
- April 17, 2010 – Hindu extremists attacked a group of 400 Christians at a prayer meeting in Madhya Pradesh, India, causing the death of a 25-year-old man and severely injuring three other believers.

Our brothers and sisters in the Lord on the other side of the world go through far more intense persecutions than us. In comparison to theirs, what we go through are nothing more than some harassments from the evil ones.

A. IMITATE ME JUST AS I ALSO IMITATE THE LORD

2 Timothy 3:10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance,

The Lord knows what we truly are even if others may not have any idea. But if you spend everyday for years with somebody, you get to know that person quite well. That is the reason why our spouses know about us so well, sometimes whole lot more than ourselves.

By now Timothy had been with apostle Paul for many years. They literally had gone through good times as well as many difficulties together. If there was anyone who would know about Paul in-depth, it would have been Timothy. What this apostle was doing was giving a living example to his spiritual son Timothy to imitate.

When I was a baby Christian 23 years ago and I read the first portion of 1 Corinthians 11:1

1 Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

I thought apostle Paul was rather cocky to say that the people of Corinth should imitate him until I read the second half.

We all need a godly model to do what Christ tells us to do. The disciples of Jesus had the highest privilege to see what He did; how He interacted with people; how He spent night after night in prayer to the Father in heaven; how compassionate he was to the lowly and downcast, but how in-your-face Jesus was to the religious leaders of His days.

Since Jesus Christ was no longer available to the people as an example on earth, the Lord used apostle Paul as His example to show us what needed to be done. That was what Timothy learned – doctrines, faith, manner of life, purpose, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions and afflictions.

In other words, apostle Paul practiced what he preached. This does not limit to the Christian leaders whom we know.

We live, work and play with unbelievers in this world. Do you really think that an unbeliever would get up in the morning and say, "I am going to follow the Lord Jesus for the rest of my life. I will start to read the Bible everyday and have a daily devotion"? You are the Bible they are going to read – how you interact with them, how you respond to your own life dilemmas and more. You are writing the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to YOU. What kind of Gospel would your family members and coworkers read from your life?

The best kind of Christianity is not only taught, it is also caught by seeing it lived out in other people. Because what we believe will determine how we live.

B. WHAT PERSECUTIONS I ENDURED

2 Timothy 3:11 persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra--what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Since apostle was such a nice guy with all the attributes mentioned in v10, he must have had a welcoming red carpet at every place he went, don't you think? No, he didn't get treated well most of the time:

- At Antioch, Paul was kicked out of the city for preaching the Gospel. – Acts 13:50
- At Iconium, Paul was almost executed by stoning. – Acts 14:5
- At Lystra, they actually did stone Paul and leave him for dead. – Acts 14:19

Many people today think that godliness means escaping persecution. I wonder how apostle Paul would match up with today's concept of a Christian leader. I am absolutely positive that the human resource manager of the ministry he applies would laugh at his resume and appearance:

- Paul was a regular jail bird. He has been in and out of prison so many times that he lost count. He spent more time inside of prison than outside after his third missionary journey.
- He stirred up problems in just about every place he visited.
- He was poor and did not care to cater to the rich.
- Every time he got on board a ship, the ship sank. None of the cruise companies would allow him to get on board.
- He had physical afflictions – according to Josephus, a Jewish historian, Paul had a set of runny eyes, a hooked nose (He was a Jew, what do you expect?), a bald head, a slightly hunchback and a pair of bow legs. Obviously, you would not see him on a cover of the GQ magazine.

Yet the Lord our God used him ever so mightily that he wrote the majority of the NT and had more influences than any other apostles, and God did more miracles through him than others in the NT with the exception of Jesus.

C. IF YOU ARE GODLY, YOU WILL BE PERSECUTED

2 Timothy 3:12-13 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. 13 But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

If you are willing to do what the Lord tells you through the Bible, you can count on persecutions one way or another. Yes, whoever desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Some of you may think, "See what I mean? This is the reason why I don't want to be a red hot Christian. I don't want to be persecuted." Guess what buckaroo, it is so much better for being a red hot Christian on earth and get persecuted temporarily for the glory of God than being a red hot burning unbeliever in hell and get tortured eternally.

As we've learned at the beginning of this study, Christians are being persecuted all over the world. Now in America. As many of you know, I've been praying for persecutions against American Christians for sometime. I strongly believe that Satan's persecution will cleanse and purify the body of Jesus Christ in America rather than hurting us.

We may not face much violent or even economic persecution in our culture in America. But there is a great deal of social persecution Christians must deal with.

1 Peter 4:4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

As the apostles faced persecution against them, they didn't ask the Lord to remove the persecution, nor did they ask Him to get them out of it. Rather, they asked Him to help them endure through it. Because they understood the God's S.O.P. –

Standard Operating Procedure. God uses trials and persecutions against us in our lives to refine us as a goldsmith refines gold through extreme heat.

Acts 4:18-20 And they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

Acts 4:23-24 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. 24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

Acts 4:29-31 Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, 30 by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus." 31 And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Then it would be natural for us to ask Him this question quickly:

"Is there any other way or at least an easier way to refine us?" Then our Father in heaven would smile at us and assures us with His gentle words, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you; I will be with you until the end of days."

While we pray, we wait upon the Lord; while we wait upon the Lord, we gain the strength of God; while we gain the strength of God, we get to understand the will of God and become obedient to His will over ours.

When we boil down all the persecution against Christianity, it becomes temporary physical and emotional inconvenience. If the Lord chooses to take us through persecution of the evil ones, don't get upset that you would go off on your own way. After all, you are not the captain of your ship, if you are a born-again. Your ship belongs to the Lord Jesus and He is the Captain and you are mere cargo. He will lead you through the storms of your life.

I don't know what is going to happen in the landscape of American politics in November, 2010 and 2012. The world, nor America is controlled by the Republicans or the Democrats like they want to think. It is completely under the control of God.

I am not encouraging you to do nothing against evil people's work that is happening in this country. Great British statesman Edmund Burke said, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

I do encourage you to make the value of your faith known to your representative in the Congress and local political systems. And go vote. Do your civil duty.

Listen, if we are not willing to be rejected by some for the sake of Jesus Christ; if we are not willing to be an outcast before some people, then we can never be true followers of Jesus Christ.

In v13, Evil men refers to the obvious, open enemies of Jesus. Impostors refers to those who "look" fine, and many think of as fine, but they are actually destructive forces among Jesus' followers.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Since you are surrounded by other Christians, you might feel secure against the upcoming persecutions. But if you don't stay in the Word of God, due to a lack of the firm foundation in God's Word, you will crumble. It is not too late to build your faith on the Solid Rock Jesus through His Word.

2) Test every spirit against the Word of God.

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.