

Series: How to be godly when the godless bear rule

Living by faith when godliness brings persecution.

The Epistles of Peter

The persecution of Christians has already begun in America.

Excerpts from an article in christianpost.com.

- “Consider that churches were forced to close, with no solid scientific evidence supporting that decision at the time (nor provided since) for months in 2020 and into 2021, even as casinos and strip clubs were allowed to stay open. Many churches who remained opened were fined and had to go to court.
- Don’t forget about how, under the Obama Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) relentlessly prosecuted the Christian charity Little Sisters of the Poor over their religious beliefs against paying to provide for abortifacient contraceptives. It took almost a decade for the Little Sisters to finally prevail at the Supreme Court.
- For years, private Christian business owners have been dragged to court, targeted for destruction by the LGBTQ+ movement. Let’s keep listing examples:
 - **Jack Phillips, the baker**, has been harassed for over a decade, bombarded with requests to make the most profane cakes, and dragged in and out of court simply for trying to run his business as a Christian (persecution that continues despite his having prevailed at the Supreme Court).
 - **Barronelle Stutzman, a florist**, was eventually forced into retirement because she also refused to compromise on her traditional Christian faith commitments and participate in the celebration of sin.
 - **Coach Joe Kennedy** was fired for exercising his First Amendment rights to pray to God in public at midfield after the High school football game. It took him almost seven years to fight to undo this unjust persecution, prevailing only when the Supreme Court ruled that “a government entity sought to punish an individual for engaging in a brief, quiet, personal religious observance doubly protected by the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment...the Constitution neither mandates nor tolerates that kind of discrimination.”

Legally we might call this “discrimination,” but make no mistake, it is also persecution: persecution against Christians because of their faith in Jesus Christ ... and their refusal to compromise on the basic teachings of the Bible. What do you call it when a Christian is fired for believing that, according to God’s Word, God made men as men and women as women and only those two genders? Or for refusing to tell lies by using she/her or they/them to describe he/him? It’s persecution.

I would also use that word to describe the recent slew of attacks on churches across the country, including, most recently, in Maryland. The Catholic Courier reports that “A Catholic church in the Washington suburb of Bethesda was one of three houses of worship along the same road to be victimized by vandalism the weekend of July 9-10.” One of those buildings was set on fire.

Even crisis pregnancy centers, many of them run by Christians, are under attack because they promote life, rather than death. Since early May, when the *Dobbs* decision was leaked suggesting that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned, they have been threatened, vandalized, and firebombed. And Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass,

another one of the more outspoken progressive politicians in our country, is angrily encouraging even more of such violence.

Persecution of 1st Century Christians

“In the year 64 a fire destroyed 10 of the 14 wards of Rome. The emperor Nero, accused by the people of being the instigator of the fire, threw the blame on to the Christians. He began the first great persecution which lasted until 68 and saw perish, among others, the apostles Peter and Paul.

The great historian **Tacitus Cornelius** (54-120), senator and consul, described these events when, in the reign of Trajan, he wrote his Annals. He accused Nero of having unjustly attacked the Christians, but declared himself convinced that they merited the most severe punishments because of their superstitions from which sprang every nefarious deed. Thus he did not even share in the compassion experienced by many people in seeing them tortured.

Here is the famous quotation from **Tacitus**: *“To cut short the public outcry, Nero had to find someone guilty, and blamed a race of men despised for the perversity of their rites and commonly called Christians. The name comes from Christus (Christ), who was put to death when Pontius Pilate was pro-Consul and Procurator of Judea. Now, this pernicious superstition has broken out anew, not only in Judea, the place of origin of this scourge, but even in Rome, where all that is shameful and abominable comes together and is accepted.*

At first were arrested those who openly confessed their belief. Then, after their accusation, a great multitude were imprisoned not just accused of having caused the fire, but because they were regarded as being burning with hatred against the human race. They were put to death with refined cruelty, and Nero added scorn and derision to their sufferings. Some were clad in the skins of wild beasts and thrown to the dogs to be devoured; others were nailed to the cross, others burned alive, and still others covered with inflammable material which was then set on fire to serve as torches after sunset. Nero allowed his gardens (on the Vatican hill) to be used for this spectacle... Although these punishments were against a blameworthy people who merited such original torments, there arose a sense of pity, since they had been sacrificed not for the common good but from the cruelty of the tyrant.” (XV,44)ⁱ

“One such persecution that was yet to come took place “early in the second century in Bithynia, one of the provinces to which Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:1). A letter was sent from Pliny, governor of Bithynia, to the Roman emperor Trajan, in AD 1122. He explained that he had been executing people who confessed that they were Christians. Trajan’s reply expressed his approval of Pliny’s policy but instructed him to set free those Christians who would renounce their faith and worship the Roman gods.”ⁱⁱ Since Peter most likely wrote in the 60’s, the worst persecution was yet to come. Peter’s rock solid faith through his own persecution surely became a solid cornerstone for the tested faith of his readers.

Commentator H.A. Ironside - "He who had been commissioned by the risen Christ to feed and shepherd the sheep and lambs of the flock, speaks to those who were in Jesus' words scattered about as sheep without a shepherd ie. saved Jews that were visiting strangers to Jerusalem

on the day of Pentecost, now scattered back in their gentile countries.”

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How do we live godly when the godless start attacking us for our faith in Jesus?

The Context of Peter's Epistles

Peter was writing to believers while he was imprisoned in Rome the city where he was crucified at about 75 years old under the reign of Nero. He like Paul in the midst of imprisonment encouraged his readers who were undergoing trials and persecution.

“And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” Philippians 1:28,29.

Peter and Paul were relaying what their Lord Jesus had said, suffering as a Christian comes with the territory.

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you” (1Peter 4:12).

Jesus warned the 12 just before His death,

“If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before *it hated* you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” John 15:18-20.

1. The finished product of our faith is more precious than gold.

1 Peter 1:7 “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold...”

2. The price paid for our redemption is precious.

1 Peter 1:18,19 “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, *as silver and gold*, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”

3. The Author of our faith is Precious

1 Peter 2:7 “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious”

4. The experiences Peter had shared with Jesus were precious.

▪ Peter had seen Jesus'

- ✓ glory 2 Peter 1: 16-18; Matthew 17:2
- ✓ crucifixion 1 Peter 1:19; 2:24
- ✓ resurrection 1 Peter 3:18,21; John 20:3-6; 21:15-19
- ✓ ascension 1 Peter 3:22; Acts 1:9-12
- ✓ awaited His return 1 Pet 4:13

1 Peter 2:4,5 "To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and precious*, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

2 Peter 1:1, 4 "Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like **precious faith** with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and **precious promises**: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

*Refining gold literally deals with recovering gold to its pure state so that the end product is free from impurities that may impair the quality of the gold. Using the refiner's fire process - (6 hrs. Increase by 10c/every minute for 1.75 hours, to the melting point of 1102 degrees C, (2016 degrees) & keep increasing to 1200 C, hold for 2 hours to 1200C, hold temperature 3 hours, when slag is pasty, sticky, remove leaving 85-90% pure gold) The second phase is inquartation and parting. This method uses alloys such as silver or copper that is added to the gold and melted. What is left is a material that contains 25% or less of pure gold. The next step in this process is to add nitric acid that literally flushes out the alloys and leaves a sludge like gold residue. This is then washed, filtered and dried for use. This process is capable of producing a gold purity of 99.99%

Quality	Gold Content
14kt	58.3%
18kt	75%
22kt	91.6%
24kt	99.9%

The Tribulation is Israel's coming crucible of fire that will purge all who are without faith.

"And it shall come to pass, *that* in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off *and* die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, *It is* my people: and they shall say, The LORD *is* my God." Zechariah 13:8,9

ⁱ The persecutions of the first century – Early Christians, www.christianpost.com

ⁱⁱ Hebrew Greek Key Word Study Bible, Spiros Zodhiates, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga , TN., 2008, P 1535