

Friendly Fire in the Church: God's Answer to a Growing Crisis

We are experiencing a dramatic change in the cultural climate, both in the United States and around the world. The temperature is rising, as is the heat against Christians in particular.

As believers we would be foolish to expect sympathy from the secular world. Jesus promised us, "You will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt. 24:9b).

Is it any wonder, then, that there has been such little media coverage and response from world leaders (other than the obligatory condolences and empty promises to bring about justice) to ISIS's beheading of Christians in droves, or to churches being blown up throughout the Middle East, or to entire towns of Christians in India being slaughtered? Truth be told, such murdering and torturing of believers was on the rise years before ISIS emerged. So the global apathy is not surprising.

What is alarming, however, is the growing trend of considering Christian persecution a mere myth. And what should concern us even more is who is helping to promote this idea.

The argument is simple: Christianity is the majority religion in the world, with more than 2.2 billion people—about one-third of the world population—claiming an association with the Christian faith; therefore, any reports of persecution toward Christians are part of their deceptive scheme to keep the masses sympathetic toward their cause. As one cynical columnist wrote, "Who can resist the deliciousness of having both the upper hand of power and the righteousness of the oppressed?"

In America, this argument is frequently voiced with both reason and subtlety. The logical objection is that, unlike most nations in the world, the United States still upholds the ideal of religious freedom. Therefore to say Christians are persecuted in America is nothing more than a myth—after all, none of the believers listed in the previous section lost their lives or were tortured for their faith.

Indeed, the United States and many “post-Christian” nations have a long way to go before their level of Christian persecution can compare to places such as North Korea, Somalia, Iraq or Syria. Though I pray the current level never increases, the point remains for those of us in America: the cases listed above—and countless others—are still reminders that our country is rapidly shifting even further away from its Christian roots. And within the last decade, the acceleration of decidedly anti-Christian activity is startling.

If Christians do not wake up to see what is happening—both overtly and behind the scenes—we will end up accelerating our own persecution. How do I know this? Because we can already see that one of the enemy’s methods to increase the persecution of Christians is to use Christians themselves to say such persecution does not even exist.

You would think that when believers publicly stand their ground for biblical values, they could expect support from fellow believers. At the very least, the Christian community should be a safe haven for those who have been ridiculed, mocked or penalized in the public square for their faith. Yet often the leading voices in America’s secular media touting the “myth” of Christian persecution are believers—many from a more liberal viewpoint—who claim to represent the church as a whole.

Even among smaller Christian media outlets, instances of Christian persecution— particularly the high-profile ones

stirring national debate—draw out the worst in believers and often lead to friendly fire within the church. One of the most common shots fired is that believers exaggerate by calling it “persecution” in the first place. Benjamin Dixon, a former pastor and author of *God Is Not a Republican*, says Christians in America claiming to be persecuted “are embarrassing the faith because it would appear that [they] can’t even endure what essentially amounts to someone no longer being the popular girl in school.”

These fellow believers’ main argument is that American Christians cannot claim to face real persecution as long as we are the majority of the population. Granted, I understand the dilemma of comparing the current persecution of Christians in America to that of Christians in countries where believers are beheaded for their faith. Clearly these are completely different levels of persecution.

So just because Christians hold the statistical majority in the United States does not mean the fiercer minority that hates their God cannot discriminate against them.

Jesus exhorted us to rejoice when this happens, knowing our reward in heaven is great (Matt. 5:12). Nominal and lukewarm Christians—those who make up the majority of America’s “Christians” according to the Barna study on those with a biblical worldview—do little to draw persecution upon themselves because their beliefs are shaped more by popular culture’s opinions than by what God’s Word says. This type of “Christian” will do whatever it takes—in beliefs and actions—to fit in with what culture says is true and right. Yet those willing to take a countercultural stand, those who will declare God’s truths even when they are unpopular, will face resistance in an ever-increasing way.

Again, Jesus promised we would be hated for following Him (Mark 13:13; Luke 21:17). For some, that hatred leads to death; for others, it involves being ridiculed. But whatever

the degree, we cannot ignore or downplay the attacks simply because they are not as severe in the United States as in other countries. The growing trend of ridiculing Christians signals where our nation is going. Thus the body of Christ in America must brace itself to stand strong in the face of increasing ridicule and resistance along with more intense expressions of persecution. While we still have the freedom in this country, believers must boldly speak God's truth in love—both to affect our attackers and to wake up the conscience of a church that, for the most part, has slept through the radical cultural changes thus far and done little to respond. {eoa}

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