

The Bold Lessons the Early Church Can Teach Today's Christ Followers

Note: This is the first of a two-part series.

The church was birthed, formed and grew in tumultuous times. A casual reading of the book of Acts reveals this. Church history further proves this.

Yet, Peter and the early church had God's favor, courage and power to speak the name of Christ, heal the sick and make disciples everywhere they went.

Consider the disciples' prayer after Peter and John were imprisoned, threatened, then released:

“‘Now, Lord, look on their threats and grant that Your servants may speak Your word with great boldness, by stretching out Your hand to heal and that signs and wonders may be performed in the name of Your holy Son Jesus.’ When they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:29-31).

They lifted their voices, in one accord, united against the powers of darkness manifesting through political and religious leaders' intent on stopping the church and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

The church has always faced opposition, persecution and evil. Our day is no different. However, in our moment of American history, we have never witnessed such open hostility toward Christians and the church. Last week, Supreme Court Justice Alito warned of threats to religious liberty in remarks to the Federalist Society.

Using COVID-19, governors and local leaders routinely threaten churches with harsh fines for gathering to worship, despite our constitutional First Amendment rights. A church in San Jose, California, has recently been threatened with fines of \$300,000 for gathering to worship. And this is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg of individuals and groups who want to silence, marginalize and even remove the Church from American society.

In a recent article, Dr. Michael Brown wrote:

“For years, I have documented how Christian conservatives have been likened to Hitler, to the Nazis, to the KKK, to ISIS, and that was long before Donald Trump appeared on the political scene. I have supplied verbatim quotes of protesters wishing we would be thrown to the lions or killed in other ways. Again, this had been totally unrelated to hostility toward President Trump. The hatred was in response to our conservative, biblical ideology, most particularly when it came to LGBTQ activism. And no matter how loving or gracious or compassionate we were, we were still branded haters, people who were a danger to society. People who should be removed.”

This should be a wake-up call to every American who professes Christ. Our civil and religious liberties are under assault. In many nations, persecution is already routine. No different than the early church, our fight is against unseen spiritual forces. Though defeated by Jesus, these forces, operating through people, continue to oppress, resist and attempt to stop His church—in particular conservative Christians who stand for the sanctity of life at conception, traditional family and other biblical values.

However, Jesus said “the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18b).

We can learn from the early church through their commitment to Christ and to each other. They stood together in worship, in

prayer, in the word, in fellowship and in mission to withstand and oppose the powers of darkness arrayed against them. In this hour, church, we must do the same.

In Acts 2:40-47, we read of their community, unity and purpose: "... All who believed were together..." (Acts 2:44) and "continuing daily with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart ..." (Acts 2:46).

They were a kingdom-minded community united in Christ. They met regularly, and they were humble and thankful despite the opposition. {eoa}

Note: Stay tuned for the second part of this story on Wednesday.

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