

Charisma Panel: Why Is the Government Coming Against the Church?

Recent weeks have seen a rise in government attacks on churches as more and more congregations make decisions about reopening. States as diverse as California, Florida and Kentucky have seen pastors arrested, churches sued and the body of Christ threatened with fines and worse for the simple act of meeting to worship.

I called together another Charisma panel this week to discuss the issue of why the government is coming against the church. This varied panel agreed on one thing: Churches and pastors must stand strong in an attack they all believe goes far beyond the current crisis and will have a dramatic impact on the future of the church.

Previous panels have focused on the important topics of the church's response to COVID-19 and how the church can bring healing and racial reconciliation to our country. Our diverse group for this panel included:

—Che Ahn, senior pastor of Harvest Rock Church in Pasadena, California and leader of Harvest International Ministry, an apostolic network of 162 churches and ministries in 70 nations.

—Brian Gibson, pastor of His Church, a megachurch with campuses in Owensboro, Kentucky, and Amarillo, Texas and founder of the Peaceably Gather movement.

—Rodney Howard-Browne, pastor of The River Church, Tampa Bay, Florida, and head of Revival Ministries International

—Cristian Ionescu, senior pastor of the Elim Romanian

Pentecostal Church in Chicago.

—Mat Staver, president and founder of Liberty Counsel.

Staver, who has worked with churches across the globe, summed up the issue when he said he has never wanted to confuse discrimination with persecution. “Persecution is where people lose their lives and even get threatened and arrested for having home Bible studies and fellowship. But never in my life would I have thought that we would have had that happen here in the United States,” he said.

Staver gave examples from some of the cases in which Liberty Counsel is currently involved, including that of Ahn’s Harvest Rock Church, which, Staver said, “just a short while ago received a letter from the Pasadena prosecutor threatening Pastor Che, all the people associated with the church, including the parishioners, with ... fines and criminal charges. Each charge carries up to a year in prison. If that is not persecution, Steve, I don’t know what else to call it.”

Two of our panelists have backgrounds that grant them special awareness of the insidious nature of these attacks. Ionescu, who is convinced the current progressive movement is both satanic and oppressive, said in his home country of Romania, “The Russian Army had to impose communism. In America, it is freely accepted by a large segment of society.” And Howard-Browne, who grew up in South Africa, said he realized years ago that this was a global problem. “This is not just something that would be localized to America. This was a communist takeover of the planet.”

Gibson agreed that the whole situation has been politicized, especially with the statistics for COVID-19. “It’s used to manipulate people and to control us,” he said. “Sixty-three percent of churches in America are closed. Of the 37% that are open, they have about 30% of pre-COVID attendance. ... It’s hard to get people to come to church when they think they’re going

to die if they come, and it is propaganda, and I think it's all about a November election," he said.

But none of the panelists believes we should give up. In fact, each one is standing up to counter these attacks and the powerful forces behind them. Ahn's church, with the help of Liberty Counsel, is suing California Gov. Gavin Newsom, who has "locked us down twice and also said no singing or chanting, as well as encouraged all the protesters to continue to exercise their First Amendment right to protest, and he tells them, 'God bless you.' ... And yet, no blessing on us. No First Amendment rights for the church," Ahn said.

Of course, Ahn sees the church's battle as more than simply a legal one. "I do hope that what we're doing encourages pastors, because bottom line is we need more power," he said. "We need revival. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the kind of power that would be willing to lay down our lives for His glory. ... And so I pray that this sparks a revival in our nation."

Gibson put it simply: "We're the people who believe God has overcome sickness at the cross. Let's go; let's open our churches." And his Peaceably Gather movement is helping pastors and churches do just that.

Ianescu also had strong words of encouragement, reminding believers that we need to stop "allowing the government to pretend like they care about our people more than we do. That is a travesty," he said. He pointed to a theology free of government narrative: "No. 1, God will protect us from being infected; we are going to pray and we're going to be protected. No. 2, if we get infected, we're going to be healed because we believe in divine healing. And No. 3, if we don't get healed, we're going in heaven, in God's arms."

"You have to make a stand, and you have to make a stand sometime, and the Lord is with you, and God's anointing will

be on you. So take the territory,” Howard-Browne said, revealing the fervent faith behind his bold stand against the civil authorities that threatened him and his church and continue to war against churches across the country.

Staver’s final challenge lined up with the rest. “In one passage, Jesus says, ‘Fear not, little flock,” and that’s what I would say: Fear not. Understand who we serve. We serve a God who created everything in the universe, even things we can’t even begin to imagine. We serve a God who defeated death and rose again on the third day. We serve our Lord who says the gates of hell– the fury, no matter what it is, no matter what form it comes in–will never prevail against His church. And so He wants a church that stands up boldly at this time to be able to preach the gospel and not be intimidated.

“And I would say that to pastors as well. Stop being intimidated and stand up and follow the call that God’s placed on your life,” Staver said.

For much more about this critical issue of why government at all levels is putting increasing pressure on the church, watch the video [here](#) or listen to the entire podcast [here](#). I invite you to share both with those who may not understand the serious threat our churches are facing or may need encouragement that, as one of our panelists said, “elections do matter. And elections have consequences at all levels.”

For more on the 2020 election, please visit [here](#), where you can read more about what God is doing and has done through our current administration. America must wake up. The church must wake up. And we must all take a stand–before it’s too late.

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