

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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No. 1

All That Will Live Godly in Christ Jesus Shall Suffer persecution (No. 2)

God's word mentions many important things which may happen. Other things are mentioned about which there is no probability, only certainty. If one lives "godly in Christ Jesus," suffering persecution is a certainty.

Let us, in this second part of our discussion, again emphasize the importance of the subject, persecution. It cannot be overly emphasized, inasmuch as Paul affirms that one who does not suffer persecution has not lived "godly in Christ Jesus." If one has not lived "godly in Christ," he will not realize the blessings in store for the faithful.

Once again we note Paul's exact words to Timothy concerning persecution: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2Tim. 3:12). There is no room for equivocation in this clear and direct statement, and those who truly believe God's word to be true will not try. All of us are affected; we will either "live godly in Christ Jesus" and "suffer persecution," or we will not.

We again draw attention to THAYER's definition of persecution as cited in the first part of our discussion. Persecution is from the Greek *dioko* which means: 1. to make to run or flee, put to flight,

drive away... 2. in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest one; to persecute...to be maltreated, suffer persecution on account of something." (p. 153). We will now proceed to expand, explain and apply the various details of this definition.

Not only does persecution involve causing one to run, putting one to flight and driving one away, it includes a number of other things, the omission of which will prevent complete understanding of the subject. Incomplete understanding might result in one ironically being a persecutor or the persecuted and not realize it. In the second heading THAYER says: "in any way whatever to" do these things. The first word is *harass*. WEBSTER says *harass* means: 1. to disturb persistently; torment; pester; persecute. This covers a broad range. The next word is *trouble*. WEBSTER says of it: "...to annoy, vex, or bother." Trouble is also a New Testament word; so let us note consider VINE's definition: "of subverting the souls of believers, →

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by evil doctrine, Acts 15:24; Gal. 1:7; 5:10). We next have the word *molest*. WEBSTER'S first definition is: "1. to bother, interfere with, to annoy." Akin to persecute is the word maltreat, which WEBSTER says is: "to treat or handle badly or roughly; abuse."

With all this in mind, we see that violent physical persecution is only one manifestation. In other words, people can be persecuted in many ways. In our latter discussion, we will note present instances of persecution; but, let us first continue the original focus of our discussion and continue from that point. Since we discussed in some detail the persecution of Christ and the apostle Paul, we will now consider:

IV. MARTYRS AND PERSECUTION

The English word "martyr" is from a Greek word *martus*, which comes from the idea of a witness. VINE'S says it is "one who bears witness by his death." This is the sense in which we will be using the word in our discussion. The word "martyr" is

found in the New Testament, and references are made to those who gave their lives, where the word martyr is not used.

The first use of the word martyr is found in Acts 22:20, where Paul speaks of Stephen: "And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting to his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him." The next time we find the word martyr is in Christ's letter to the church in Pergamos: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth" (Rev. 2:13). John said, "And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration" (Rev. 17:6). In each of these cases, we see the faithful witnesses giving the ultimate, life itself.

Some, not explicitly called martyrs, yet were. There were John the Baptist, Jesus, and James (Acts 12:2). There is reason to believe that nearly all the apostles died as martyrs, including the apostle Paul, who, when penning his last epistle (2Tim. 4:6-8), seems to suggest that the end of his life was near. Religious history reveals many martyrs, some well known, such as Polycarp. FOX'S BOOK OF MARTYRS names many who died as martyrs. The church early church was in general persecuted by the Jewish powers, and later the Romans.

V. CHRISTIANS TAUGHT TO ENDURE PERSECUTION, EVEN MARTYRDOM

Early on, Christ speaks of the blessings received by enduring persecution: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness....Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely....Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted the prophets which were before you" (Matt. 5:10-12). Christ warned the twelve when they were sent out, "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues..." (Matt. 10:17). Christ goes on to say, †

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul...” (Matt. 10:28). Our Lord warns of many other persecutions which may befall His followers.

Paul warns the Ephesian elders of persecution which was to come. He said, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). Paul said to the Romans, “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

Peter says that we should not suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or a busybody, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf [glorify God in this name, ASV]” (1Pet. 4:16). Peter also said, that if we suffer for doing well we should take it patiently “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps” (I Pet. 2:21). Peter warns against false teachers, who are a dangerous source of persecution, saying, “...there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring damnation upon themselves...” (2 Pet. 2:1).

A well known passage which effectively brings out the extent to which Christians should endure persecution, even martyrdom, is in the letter which Christ directed to the church in Smyrna. Christ said: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death and, I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

According to history, this passage reflects the situation which many Christians faced in the first century. This trial of one’s faith involved the ultimate — “Faithful unto death.” This involved the degree to which one would go to pass the test in the ultimate way, that of dying for one’s faith. The passage is popularly quoted, albeit at times misapplied. Christians are told that to be finally saved they must be “faithful unto death.” Whereas it is

true that we must be faithful as long as we live, this passage speaks of being faithful with view toward dying for it; that is, being faithful with death staring you in the face. In our time there are few opportunities to die as a martyr, which is what Revelation 2:10 entails. The meaning here, as made clear by the context, is to be faithful unto the point of dying, becoming a martyr. It is not a fact that we must die as martyrs, but it is a fact that we must be faithful as long as we live. If it were necessary to die as a martyr to be saved, then no one would be saved at the present time.

If the same condition which the brethren faced at Smyrna should come to be today, then it would be necessary to be faithful to the point of dying as a martyr. The likelihood that we will face such a condition within the next few years is practically nil. In fact, there is very little physical persecution occurring anywhere that I know of, although brother Jim Waldron has reported some physical attacks on brethren in India. If Islam were ever in control in our country, then we could expect heads to roll, as Moslems murder infidels and unbelievers. This has been the practice of Islam from its very beginning, and the goal of that evil religion is world domination.

There are many warnings in God’s word concerning false teachers, and other means of persecution. We are taught to be prepared to meet those trials in a way that we can have victory; and, God has made that victory possible. There is no power that can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35), but we can separate ourselves from Christ by loving the world and/or by “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb. 3:12). Sadly, many do this.

We have only touched upon the abundance of material in God’s word about persecution in the First Century, but we trust that what we have covered will encourage more study and consideration of the subject. As stated earlier, we will now turn our attention to *present persecution*. We shall consider different areas where persecution is now occurring, or can occur. We need to bear in mind that one can turn from being persecuted to become a persecutor. and vice versa. We begin with: →

VI. PERSECUTION FROM THE SECULAR WORLD OF CHURCH AND MEMBERS

None of us has seen a time that can even be compared with the efforts now occurring to remove every vestige of God's influence from our society. Virtually every day we see or hear of efforts by those who do not believe in God to take God out of the picture. Whereas under the guise of "free speech," virtually any and everything of an immoral nature can be said, as long as it does not involve upholding God in any way. It is not that the majority of people fit this category, though the number is increasing; but, a minority is allowed to rule the majority. That which has been acceptable to the greater majority of our people during the history of our country, is now being rejected as more and more people turn against God. This is very troubling to those who believe in God and serve Him.

In the political world, more and more of our politicians are appealing to people on the basis of advocating or supporting things which are opposed by God in no uncertain terms. It is not uncommon to hear politicians vilify that which they call "the religious right," accusing them of causing many of the problems in our society, which are caused by ungodliness.. The field of politicians is in general becoming more ungodly, and the sad thing about it is that more and more people are going along with it.

One may ask, "How is this persecution?" We noted in the definition of persecution earlier that it covers that which "troubles" people. That is, that which would trouble people who truly believe in God. The present condition in our secular society should indeed be troubling to everyone. It should be to every faithful Christian. Christ said of people of the world that "men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). The world is becoming more worldly all the time and this puts more pressure on the true servant of God. But we should not falter. The Christians of the first century lived under a worldly government, but many were able to serve God acceptably. If they did, so can we.

VII. PERSECUTION FROM THE RELIGIOUS WORLD ABOUT US

In one sense, God's people are not being persecuted by the religious world to the same extent

that was true several decades ago. The time was that the Lord's church was opposed and criticized by a great many religious people. The idea that Christ built and purchased His one distinctive church, was bitterly opposed. The teaching of God's word that we should believe and practice only that which is authorized by the by the word of God, word, came in for criticism, and creeds and confessions were looked to as guides. That baptism, a burial in water, for the remission of sins was a necessary part of conversion was strongly denied, as well as many other things as clearly taught by God's word.

In more recent times, the religious world about us seems to have become indifferent about what is taught and practiced by the true Christian. Indifference has become so widespread, that there is little concern as to what is taught and practiced by anyone. The number of religious groups has increased to thousands, and that number is increasing. Some religious people believed in what they taught and practiced decades ago to the extent that they were willing to participate in public discussions or debates. That is just about a thing of the past.

That things have changed in the religious world does not mean that it has ceased to persecute the true Christian. Earlier we noted VINE's definition of "trouble" covered "subverting the souls of believers, by evil doctrine." This continues to happen as believers are faced with or exposed to "evil doctrine." Due to this type of persecution some are subverted. This is indeed a common form of persecution, and we see the results of it in those who are departing from the faith, as they associate with and fellowship those who hold to evil doctrines.

We are seeing more and more unscriptural practices within the church. Instead of influencing others to take God at his word, many of our own people are being influenced to accept that which pleases man rather than God, as practiced by our religious neighbors. It has come to the point that people, including some members of the church, are looking for that which allows virtually anything the people want. Outright materialism has become the ↑

chief concern of so many. True worship is not of the great concern that it used to be. There is such a great need for the spiritual leadership and the love of the truth to exist within His church.

We now move on to another aspect of persecution, that which pertains to the individual member of the church. We are accountable to God as individuals. Therefore we need to be concerned about our individual actions and responsibilities.

VIII. PERSECUTION OF- AND BY- THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

Remember that we are focusing on persecution as it is brought to bear upon those who stand for and practice God's word in a faithful way. People in religious error can persecute and be persecuted, but this is not what Paul was talking about when he said that "those who live Godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution."

The Persecuted Individual. The individual christian can be persecuted by the teaching and practice of evil doctrine, teaching which is not the "doctrine of Christ." This can come via teachers, preachers, and other members. When the "doctrine of Christ" is not taught on the subject of divorce and remarriage, it should "trouble" the faithful child of God. It could lead one to go contrary to God's will. This holds true with regard to many other teachings of Christ. If one is not bothered by any false teaching, something is seriously wrong..

The individual is being persecuted when he is criticized for upholding the truth without fear of favor of men. It is some times the case that those who stand for the truth are avoided by those who would settle for less than the whole counsel of God. The individual is being persecuted when the leadership and others will not respond to his questions and concerns about spiritual matters. I have known of several instances where elderly sisters in Christ were completely ignored and disregarded when they raised questions about things which are not "sound doctrine." It is heartbreaking to think of sisters who have known and loved the truth years, only to be ignored as if they were not important. It is persecution when the individuals have something forced upon them which is not accord-

ing to truth. This happens time and again, and in some instances it is almost impossible for the individual to worship with a sound congregation, because of distance of travel or other matters.

The Persecuting Individual. Just as the individual can be persecuted, he can also be involved in persecuting others. This happens when efforts are made in teaching that which is false doctrine. In some instances just a few individuals can take over in a congregation, and set it on a course that God does not approve. They sometimes persecute using false accusations, or making charges without proof.

It is persecution when one sets himself up as the sole of authority in a congregation, which arrangement has no biblical authority. This type of thing happens within many congregations. A person may become infatuated with himself and feel that he is somehow just a little bit above others. Diotrefes was such an one (3Jno.). John said, "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrefes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not." Diotrefes must have had a lot of cousins, since we see similar problems today. It is not uncommon for an individual to think of himself more highly than he should.

It is persecution to teach and persuade another person to accept a false doctrine. Paul mentions a number of false teachers, who were persecuting true Christians, and the cause of Christ in general. Paul said of Hymenaeus and Alexander who were responsible for having made the faith of some "shipwreck" (I Tim. 1:19-20). Paul said, "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil..." (2 Tim. 4:14). John speaks of those who would not bring the doctrine of Christ. "If there come any unto you any and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into you house, neither bid him God speed; For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (III John 9-10). One does not have to teach a false doctrine directly. Bidding Godspeed to those who do amounts to the same, as far as guilt goes. This is a serious problem today, in that many brethren are bidding Godspeed to false teachers, rather than rebuking them or taking them to task. Christians who live ungodly lives are persecutors →

of the faithful brethren. The influence of such people serves as a hindrance to the cause of Christ, and those who uphold it faithfully. Demas forsook Paul for the love of the world” (2 Tim. 4:10). This must have been troubling to Paul and others, just as it is today when person departs from the truth. Bringing reproach upon the body of Christ is a serious matter and a type of persecution.

While we could mention many ways by which individuals become persecutors and are persecuted, we want to turn our attention to another group which makes up the church.

IX. PREACHERS — PERSECUTED AND PERSECUTORS

Preachers are certainly an often persecuted group, and some times persecutors themselves. This may well be due to the fact that preachers have more influence than most others in the church. They are regularly before the congregation teaching and preaching; and, they usually associate with many members of the church outside the assemblies. In the following we shall note various ways preachers are persecuted, and also note preachers as persecutors.

Persecuted Preachers. Preachers are often let go because they preach and teach on subjects which some do not want to hear. Over the years, I have known of several preachers who were fired; and, I am privy to the surrounding circumstances. I myself have been fired.

We start with a preacher who is told by the leadership, “Do not preach on the subject of divorce and remarriage.” The preacher knows what the Bible teaches on the subject, and knows he is obligated to declare the whole counsel of God. He preaches on the subject anyway, and he is given his walking papers. Sometimes those who did not want to hear the truth preached on that particular subject react in mean and hateful ways. Either way, the preacher is being persecuted for teaching the truth. I know of more than a few instances of this.

Another preacher addresses the moral implications of tobacco use, pointing out the well-known dangers of the same. Experience shows that some christians are going to use tobacco regardless of the dangers. Sometimes people do not like to have their toes stepped on by the truth; thus, rather than conforming

to the truth, they take it out on the preacher who proclaims the truth. In a matter of time, some people in the congregation, at times including the leadership, ask the preacher to move on; not because he preached error, but because he taught the truth which some would not accept. Truth is truth regardless of whether people accept it or not.

As preacher begins to meddle, as some are wont to say, when he preaches about social drinking, dancing and immodest dress. Well, some who do such things begin to talk to others about that preacher, and what he is preaching. In a matter of time, if the leadership does not stand with the preacher, the possibility of changing preachers may begin to be discussed. Those opposing the preacher, do not exactly level with brethren as to why they want a change; but, sooner or later suggestions are made that the preacher should move on. He has not preached or done anything out of harmony with God’s word; he has in this regard lived “godly in Christ Jesus.” He suffers persecution just as Paul said.

A preacher points out political and other organizations who uphold and encourage such sins as homosexuality and abortion. He presents lessons on the error of supporting such and thus bidding them God-speed. Some people take it personally, and though the preacher has done what God expects of him: that is: speak against what is contrary to God’s word wherever it may be. Preachers — all christians — should operate without “without partiality and without hypocrisy” (Jam. 3:17). They should “abhor that which is evil; cleave to this which is good” (Rom. 12:9). Like the Son, they should be those who “loved righteousness, and hated iniquity....” (Heb. 1:9). When people oppose the preaching of the truth on something having to do with sin, they are persecuting the preacher who preaches it. In such cases, people can be stirred so offended and outraged that they will resort to outrageous means to strike out at the source of their outrage, the preacher. So, the preacher must go; not for preaching error, but for preaching the truth.

A preacher addresses the subject of homosexuality, which is certainly a Bible subject and severely condemned. Someone is displeased with the discussion and not willing to let the matter go accepting what the Bible teaches. Instead, there is a movement ↴

of opposition, which culminates in the preacher moving on. Again, this is persecution for preaching the truth, not error.

A preacher is fired for calling the names of false teachers, which practice is justified by the New Testament. Some, even elders, even want immediately to “stop his pay,” though he has not preached error.

We could give other examples of persecutions of preachers, and note the fact that some preachers have become so discouraged by persecution that they have given up the perceived source of their hurt, preaching. We move on the other side concerning preachers.

Persecuting Preachers. It would be highly unfair not to consider preachers as persecutors. The preacher is in a position to persecute an unlimited number of people. He can do this through his preaching of error. Consider how many people who have been taught error by such men as: Rubel Shelly, Rick Atchley, and F. Lagard Smith, just to name a few. Only the Lord knows just how many people have been led into error by false teachers. That the Lord knew this would happen is attested by the several warnings concerning false teachers, many of whom are preachers.

If one is not willing to take the Lord’s word in Matthew 19:9, that the only reason for divorce and remarriage is fornication, it is only a matter of looking around to find some preacher who will go along with just about anything on the subject.

Just think of the number of preachers now violating God’s law on fellowship. Such preachers are actually denying the distinctiveness of the church which our Lord purchased with His blood. By implication they are saying that it is not necessary to obey the Gospel of Christ to be saved. F. LaGard Smith goes a step farther, in believing some will be saved without baptism, just as a great many religious people believe.

Another way a preacher may be guilty of persecution is by a failure to declare the whole counsel of God. Some preachers shun certain subjects which some might not want to hear. This is compromising the truth to please man. Some preachers, for some reason or other, are just not going to lay it on the line, as did the New Testament preachers. Some do not preach on certain subjects because it “might hurt

someone’s feelings,” notwithstanding the fact that it must hurt the Lord’s feelings when people will not stand up for Him and His word.

Some preachers seem to stay on the safe side, by not ruffling any feathers, lest they might have to move on. Many years ago while teaching a group of men in India, some of whom were denominational preachers, one young man, who obviously wanted to be on financial support, said: “Just tell me what you want me to preach and I’ll preach it.” Those who think that way may not all be in India.

Preachers are persecutors when their personal lives are not upright. This can bring great reproach upon the church. More than a few preachers have fallen for women, or a woman who is not their wife. Though our society has come to the point that moral matters do not matter in many cases, but this does not relieve the preacher or any Christian from the responsibility to live a life which has God’s approval.

Though a book could be written on the subject of persecution, this is not our intention. We rather want to touch upon a few things, some of which many seem not to be aware that they constitute persecution. Our last category of members of the church to be discussed is the elders.

X. ELDERS PERSECUTED — ELDERS AS PERSECUTORS

It is God’s plan that congregations be overseen by elders, that is, by such men as meet His qualifications as set down in the New Testament. In many instances congregations do not have qualified men, but all should work toward that end. In the absence of elders, it is up to the faithful men of the congregation to serve as the leadership. There is no doubt but that one of the greatest weaknesses in the church today is the lack of a qualified leadership.

Persecuted Elders. As Paul said, godly members of the church are going to suffer persecution. This certainly includes elders. Years ago, an elder came to me and said the young people were taking over, or words to that effect. The congregation was going along quite well, but some of the younger people wanted to have it their way. The leadership of the elders was no longer being accepted. The elders in this case were being persecuted by some of the membership of the →

congregation. The congregation began to be involved in things which would not have been acceptable to the elders in times gone by.

A couple is involved in that which was not consistent with a christian conduct. The elders go about to counsel these people, but their counsel is not accepted. Elders, of course, should never cave in when they are doing their God-given duty, even though they may be persecuted.

A congregation goes along quite well for a number of years, but there begins to be criticism by those who desired to be more like the congregations round about, some of which are very liberal. The result is the rejection of the counsel and leadership of the elders. The eldership suffer persecution.

The Crossroads Movement came to be called the Boston Church Movement, and now the International Church of Christ. It was the practice of this movement of error to go into congregations and undermine the leadership, and then take over the congregation. Many congregations were split by this means. The elders were being persecuted for standing up for God's way rather than man's way.

Persecuting Elders. Perhaps one of the most common instances of elders being persecutors is when men aspire to be in the position of an elder when they do not meet the God-given qualifications. Quite a number of people want to be elders, but not nearly so many want to do the work of an elder. Being an elder involves one of the greatest responsibilities of any member of the church. They are charged with watching for the souls of those who serve under them, as they that must give account (Heb. 13:17). This is something that some elders are not willing to assume. It pays to be cautious and concerned when one too eagerly aspires to be an elder.

One way by which elders become persecutors is that of assuming power and authority which they do not have. Peter addresses this problem when he said, "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). That is, they are not to rule with an arrogant or domineering spirit. I have heard elders referred to as "bosses." They are not bosses in the common usage of that term. Neither are they to have the spirit of a dictator. A number of years ago a number of brethren met with

the elders of a nearby congregation. The elders declared that if they told a woman to teach over men, and she refused, that she would be sinning. These elders were guilty of lording it over God's heritage. The congregation was very liberal.

A faithful member of the church goes to the elders and raising legitimate questions about a lesson delivered by a preacher which raised many questions. The elders are not willing to face the facts of the matter for some reason. They opt to be persecutors of the one raising questions that should have been raised. This type of thing happens quite often

Literal one-man "elderships" are not unheard of; then, too, virtual one-man elderships are not uncommon. Sometimes when there is a plurality of elders, one man of the "ship" is actually the one who controls things. This is a violation of God's will; it can create an environment for persecution.

Elders some times bind or loose on the basis of their judgment, not on the basis of what the Word teaches. Elders do not have any authority to do anything that God does not approve, but some times they assume that power. Such abuse of power makes us again think about Diotrephes (3 Jno. 9), who loved to have the preeminence. Things do not change a great deal with the passing of time; we still have those who love to have the preeminence.

As I have never seen before, elders are in so many cases in the forefront of leading their flocks astray. Some may be critical thinking this is overstatement, but we must face reality. In some cases, those serving as elders do not have enough knowledge of God's word to carry out their duties, which not only involve feeding the flock, but protecting it from the great variety of false teachers. In other cases it is evident that the lack of love for the truth is involved. One who does not have sufficient knowledge and love for the truth can be swayed by a number of things, which are contrary to God's word.

Sometimes people have the idea that one is not to question an elder about things which may not be right, but this is not the teaching of the New Testament. Elders stand to be rebuked when they sin, that others may fear (1 Tim. 5:20).

While elders, who are truly qualified can be the greatest of blessings to a congregation, they also

have the potential of being among the greatest of persecutors because of their position and the general reluctance of members of the church to contend for the faith.

CONCLUSION

As we noted, the extended definition of persecution given by THAYER shows that many things constitute persecution. This should help us to distinguish between being persecuted being persecutor. By summary, we have noted the following concepts associated with persecution: harass, disturb persistently, torment, pester, persecute, trouble, annoy, vex, or bother, molest, interfere with, to annoy, to be maltreated, that is to be treated or handled roughly, abuse. Though we are not likely to be persecuted to the point of martyrdom, we have seen that persecution manifests itself in many ways.

We can mark it down with certainty, that if we stand for the truth as we ought, we will experience persecution. And, we are to be as militant soldiers of our Lord. We are to “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called...” (I Tim. 6:12). We are to “stand fast in the faith” (I Cor. 16:13). Also we “should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). We are to contend as combatants. We have heard people, sometimes jokingly ask, “If Christianity were against the law, would there be enough evidence to convict you?” In a serious manner, we should consider whether or not we stand up for the truth enough to bring on persecution?

We should bear in mind that when we fail in serving the Lord as we should, we have become persecutors of Christ and His way. I have heard members of the church say, “It is nobody’s business what I do.” Well, it is someone else’s business when we become persecutors of others. When we live together as the faithful spiritual family that we should be, then there should be great mutual concern.

Years bring tears and experiences that others may have yet to see. Personal experiences tend to affect, even mold us. Paul said, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give

me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8) Paul knew very well what it meant to suffer persecution, for he had experienced both mental and physical persecution. But there was no doubt in his mind that the reward in store — “a crown of righteousness” — made it more than worthwhile to suffer the persecution he endured.

Though, in no sense a martyr like Paul and others of the First Century, I have over the years experienced persecution. I thankfully have never been harmed in a physical way by being imprisoned, beaten, or having my life threatened. I would like to think that under such persecution I would stand my ground, but it would be unwise to categorically what I would do. What we have tried to convey is the idea that non-physical persecution can bring much to bear upon a person. Having people to bear false witness and lie about you. is tough to bear. I have never been fired for preaching false doctrine, but I have for preaching the truth. That is hard to get past. Being unceremoniously and unnecessarily told to move your family out of the preacher’s house is a bitter pill. Naomi and I have had our financial support stopped when we were living in a foreign country, thus causing us to have to spend much time to regain our support in order to continue our work. I know the pain of having even elders to outright lie against me.

I am by no means alone. Other preachers have experienced similar things to what I have experienced, some even worse. Some preachers give up and throw in the towel. I am thankful for God’s helping me to persevere. Persecution can be difficult to bear, but we are emboldened remembering that nothing we face even begins to compare with what the First Century Christians faced.

Whatever persecution we may face is worth enduring many times over. Just think of the serious implications if we face persecution because of our faith. Paul said those who “live godly in Christ Jesus we shall suffer persecution.” The Lord help us to live godly in Christ Jesus so that we will endure the inevitable persecution and continue to stand for Him who died for us.

—Editor

Concerning the Study of the Bible

Due to the invaluable rewards available and the incomprehensible losses to be suffered, there is hardly a more important subject than that of studying the Bible, God's word. During our earthly existence our eternal destinies will be determined by our knowledge of and response to God's Word.

Our Creator has shown His unfathomable love and concern for mankind by making His will known to us. We have been especially blessed in this Christian Age in that God has made His will known to us by the written word; a blessing not available to many in the ages before. But to utilize this great blessing to its fullness we must study God's Word.

What do we mean by *studying the Bible*? While there is something to be gained by simply reading the Bible, that gain is miniscule in comparison to that which is to be gained by a true and serious study of the Bible. Paul, in just a few words to Timothy, sets forth the necessity of knowing God's word. "Give diligence (study, KJV) to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth" (2Tim. 2:15). The word "diligence" carries the idea of putting forth effort, zeal and labor. The reward of this is being "approved" unto God. God's approval is contingent upon this. Study is necessary to know or "handle aright" the word of truth. With some people, knowledge of God's word is so lacking that they see little or no difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. When there is proper study, there will be no cause for us to be "ashamed." Do you think that some of us will face the judgment, having been "ashamed"?

The kind of study so urgently needed is even more than just committing scripture to memory. One can memorize passages of scripture, and still not understand what those passages mean. Study is required in order to know.

The Great Need for Study. Brethren, there has never been in our lives a time when we had a greater need for study of God's word than right now. In general, we are not studying God's word as we should. The evidence of this failure is being seen on virtually every hand. It is very evident that many of us are not realizing the danger of this failure to study and the price to be paid for that.

God said, through the prophet Hosea, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou has rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee..." (Hosea 4:6). Only our Lord knows how many of His servants may be destroyed for the same reason, never knowing the eternal blessings of God.

Things Contributing to Lack of Study. Part of our weakness in the study of God's word is a failure to plan for profitable study. We often shy away from most of the spiritual "meat" and opt for "milk." The results? — A failure to grow into knowledgeable and mature servants of the Lord. Whereas the time was that children really learned from a study of the Bible, it is now often the case that that time is wasted in crafts, play and fun. When such occurs it is evident that proper plans are lacking.

In our planning in Bible study, we tend to stay away from that which requires real effort on the part of the teacher and the students. This is seen in the books of the Bible we choose to study. The Old Testament is so often avoided. God's word is kind of like a two-sided record. One side is the Old Testament, the other side the New Testament. It is impossible to know all that we should know without playing both sides of the record.

Though we are not now living under the Old Testament as a law, there is so much we need to know from it to enable us to better understand the New Testament. Paul expressed the value of the Old Testament when he very succinctly said, "For whatsoever things were written afore time written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Our critics sometimes accuse us of not believing the Old Testament. Could it be that our failure to study it as we should contributes to that idea? The study of the Old Testament requires more time and effort. In this time of "quick fixes" for virtually everything we shy away from a study of it. An "elder," if you can imagine such a thing, once said in the presence of reputable witnesses: "As far as I'm concerned, you can throw the Old Testament into the waste basket." Some members of the church will study the Old Testament if challenged to do so. Of course, there are those who are not going ↴

to study, period.

A few years ago, when working with the church in Dexter, KY, I inquired as to how long it had been since the auditorium class had studied from the Old Testament. No one seemed to know; and it seemed good to all that we begin to study the Old Testament in one of the auditorium classes. We started with Genesis, and covered several books of the Old Testament. It required more work on my part and that of the class as well. To make the study more interesting and worthwhile, I made out questions on every chapter we studied. The questions were such that it required some time to answer them, but the results were encouraging. Many in the class showed real interest, some saying that the study of the Old Testament helped them so much in a better understanding of the New Testament.

Just as we so often neglect the study of all of God's word by staying away from the Old Testament, we often treat the book of Revelation in the same way. Over the years it has been the practice in many congregations to study the New Testament up to the book of Revelation and then do an about face, and head for an easier book. Yet, there is so much that we can learn from Revelation, though there is much figurative language, which is difficult to fully understand. In the very beginning of Revelation, Jesus said, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein for the time is at hand" (Rev. 1:3).

It is very profitable to study about the Seven Churches of Asia in the first three chapters of Revelation. We have here a full spectrum of "church assessment" from good to bad. In every one of the letters to the seven churches the promises are made to the "overcomer." This sets the course for the book; that is, victory to those who overcome the Devil and his evil works. What a great need there is in the present time for encouragement of those who serve the Lord. We are indeed living in "perilous times" with the enemies of God gaining ground in their effort to do away with every vestige of God's influence in our society.

"Our schools" at one time served as a great encouragement to the study of God's Word. That was back then, not now. I do not know of one of our sizeable schools which has not drifted away from its orig-

inal purpose. They have ceased to be centers of learning God's word as they once were, to become purveyors of liberalism of one kind or another.

Willing Ignorance. The apostle Peter speaks of those who were "willingly" ignorant (2 Pet. 3:5). In our time some are willingly ignorant of what God's word says; they do not want to know. In Isaiah's time some did not want the truth spoken to them. They said, "Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isa. 30:10). This attitude is still a problem in our day.

The Part Elders Should Play. God's arrangement places a great responsibility upon the elders of a congregation with regard to the knowledge of the flock. They are to "feed the church of God" (Acts 20:28). In so many instances, flocks are not being fed the whole truth. If elders themselves are not knowledgeable enough to teach effectively, they should at least search out teachers who could do what they, the elders, should do.

In "our schools," and in the church in general, things have really drifted in the past fifty years. Even the distinctiveness of the Lord's church is now being cast aside, and comfort and support given to the enemies of the cross of Christ. There is now a great deal of fellowship with man-made churches, as if they had God's approval. It is easy to see that what is happening reflects the lack of study and support of God's word. But it is evident that much of what is happening now is not due to ignorance of God's word, but a blatant disrespect for it. Knowledge without respect is useless.

In retrospect, it should not have surprised any of us that such things as we are now seeing could come to pass. We should have realized early on that the church would face hard and difficult times. Our faith should not be weakened by the evil we see, but rather emboldened by the realization that those inspired men were setting forth the truth. All manner of things may happen, but let us take courage in the fact that we can be victorious if we hold fast our faith, which is made stronger by study.

One thing we can certainly control is our emulating the noble Bereans who "...received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so" (Ac. 17:11).

—Editor

Concerning Banner of Truth Lectures, June 23-26, 2008

Reservation of the facility for BOT Lectures, June 23-26, 2008, has been made. This will be the eighth lectureship held in Murray. Each lectureship has been comprised of twenty-eight lessons delivered by twenty or more speakers. The lectureship has always been an enjoyable and learning event by which many have been encouraged. The fellowship has always been pleasant and precious.

The cost of the Lectures will be about three thousand dollars. The cost includes: rent for the theatre, a small amount for each speech delivered, lodging for some, and travel expense for some. The church at Hickory Grove will supply \$1,800.00 of the cost. This means that we will need to raise an additional \$1,200.00. If brethren wish to help with this expense, it will be greatly appreciated. Contributions to Banner of Truth can be marked for "lecture expense." We want to see the lectures take place, and are determined to see that they do. If we come up lacking, we intend to personally assume the responsibility.

A number of people would like to see the lectures continue and some have already made plans to be in attendance. People come from considerable distances to attend, and some who participate as speakers pay their own expenses, which helps to keep the cost down. This, of course, helps and is appreciated.

We so value the prayers offered in our behalf with regard to our health and the continuation of our work. Health issues make it impossible to know how long we can continue our work; but, we are committed to continuing until forced to do otherwise. This begins the seventeenth year of our publishing Banner of Truth. The paper goes into nearly every state in the U.S. and quite a few foreign countries. Please pray that we may have several more years to carry on the work and without interference.

For the cause of Christ, Walter W. Pigg, Editor

TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

...is the name of the church of which Barack Hussein Obama is a member. You can get to their website by typing in the church name in your browser's address bar.

We are planning an article on this church for the February issue of BOT. From all I have seen on the website, this group touts itself as a "black church" and one devoted to the "Afrocentric" cause.

— Editor

MISCELLANEA

We mourn the recent passing of our dear brother, Bernard Hogan of Hornbeak, TN. It had been our pleasure to know him for near twenty years. His example as a devoted Christian gentleman, who preached the gospel for many years, is one that brethren would do well to emulate.

The November-December '07 issue of BOT came out late, please excuse our tardiness. I have had another bout with a respiratory problem and simply was not able to get my work done on time. May we nonetheless belatedly wish you a happy holiday season? We are so thankful for our trustworthy BOT crew. Without the exception of the printing, they did just about all the work on this past issue. I am doing some better now, and have been able to get this issue off to Alan for him to proofread and layout.

Remember that you can really help us by letting us know of your change of address?

Readers' Response

"Dear brethren at Hickory Grove church of Christ. Elders Jimmy Lockhart, Mike Smith, Marlin Pierce, Preacher Virgil Hale, and Editors Walter W. Pigg and Alan Adams. Greetings to you all in Jesus most precious name. How are you? Hope you are doing great by the grace of God. I take this privilege to introduce myself to you; Chortian K. Samson, a gospel preacher from India, serving as a minister at Sathupalli church of Christ, also serving as an instructor at Basic Bible School – India. I'm glad to inform you that I came to know you all through the magazine **BANNER OF TRUTH** I'm receiving regularly. We also visit *David Lemmons'* website regularly. We very much appreciate your hard work in spreading the word of God around the world. WE are having good knowledge from your articles and the presentation is very nice. We are glad to inform you that we are translating it in our language and using the lessons of BOT in teaching BASIC BIBLE SCHOOL and also preaching in our congregations. How great it would be if we had BOT in Telugu (our regional language)???" — **Chorlian Samson, India.** *(It is gratifying that BOT is beneficial to you. We are happy to know that you are having a part in a very successful work in the cause of Christ. Your report of the recent conversion of 90 denominational preachers is very encouraging. It is good to know that you have plans for follow-up teaching of these new converts. That is indeed essential. I have spent some time in India several years ago. My first tenure was in 1970, and later two other times. I taught some at Mt. Zion Bible College in Tamil Nadu, and preached in several places. – Editor).*

"Dear brethren at B.O.T. Today I visited the church of Christ affiliated with Rochester College (the former Michigan Christian College). I visited because I was curious about them, how they worshipped. I was a student at Michigan Christian College from 1982-84, and back then the church was an ordinary church of Christ. In my visit we sang a cappella, with a "praise team" (male and female)... I heard hand clapping during the faster songs, and saw hands raised in the air during the slower ones..... What most disturbed me was that they have a monthly instrumental praise and worship service on Saturday night.

The Lord's church is under constant attack today. We must stand firm. The Richland Hills instrumental virus is spreading all over our brotherhood. Your sister in Christ." — **Dorean Mueller, Michigan.** *(These things should cause us to weep. We must stand fast. – Editor).*

"Please apply this money towards the Banner of Truth's Postage, and do not mention my name..." *(We thank you for helping us to continue our work. May the Lord richly bless you as you serve Him. – Editor)*

"Please accept the enclosed as a donation for your excellent paper, Banner of Truth. I'm still handing out or mailing the others that you send each month. I was sorry to read about your fall and broken arm. God bless you for you dedication to The Way. Thank you." — **Daryl C. Tucker, Canada.** *(Bro. Tucker, we appreciate greatly your handing out BOT to others. This helps to get people acquainted with BOT, and encourages them to get on our mailing list, if they contend for the faith. – Editor).*

"Thank you for sending us Banner of Truth each month. Keep up the good work you do for the Lord." — **Maurice Brown, IL.**

"I read banner of Truth every month. Thanks for putting the true word out. I think we are in a moral decay. People are living together. They think they are hiding that and think Christ does not know. The copy, vol. 16, Sept. 07, was the best one in a long time. You said you could send me 15 copies for \$2.02. I really need 20 copies. Thanks." — **Thomas E. Brannon, TN.**

"Please accept this late contribution in support of all the things you do. In preaching the gospel of Christ and publishing Banner of Truth. It has been a trying year for my wife and me. If we make it through this coming year we will pass our 88th year. Our youngest daughter lives with us and does most of the driving. We have some other help. I want to congratulate your efforts in getting out Banner of Truth. We wish the best for you and sister Pigg in this coming year." — **The Clarence E. Hall family, LA.** *(May the Lord richly bless you in this New Year, and more to come. Thanks so much for the contribution and the many others in the past.. – Editor).*

"Thanks for the excellent paper. I have enjoyed them so very much and look forward to receiving them. Please add my Christian friend and brother to your mailing list. *(Name of writer misplaced – Editor).*

"I enjoy reading Banner of Truth very much, and I would like to have it sent to me. I attend and am a member of the Decatur church of Christ. Thank you and may God bless you." — **Ms. Mavis Tate, AL.**

"I picked up a copy of your publication, Banner of Truth, and I was impressed by it. I would like to receive a copy of this publication. I would like to get a copy sent to my two brother and my dad. I'm enclosing the addresses. I thank you for this and keep up the good work." — **Darrell Harris, IL.**

"I received the July copy of BOT, which I read with much interest, and I want to receive it regularly to the same address... Thank you very much and may the Lord bless you." — **Nils Dybdal-Holthe, Norway.**

We appreciate hearing from our readers. Let us know your thoughts and concerns. —*Editor*

Fishing For Unknown Causes

“Lydia...whose heart the Lord opened...”

The Book of Acts is necessary to an understanding of original christianity as it records for us the process and moment of conversion of different kinds of people and different kinds of circumstances. An examination of each of these conversion records will substantiate at least two points: (1) Granting the fact of outside forces and motivations, conversion is yet an active rather than passive process; something you *do*, not something that is done to you. (2) Conversion takes place according to an unvarying pattern of faith, repentance and baptism by which the heart, life, and relationship of the convert are changed. Some, however, would contend that Lydia’s conversion is a pattern-buster as the Bible explicitly says of her, “whose heart the Lord opened.”

CAUSES KNOWN TO BE PRESENT. The typical view of the matter is that direct, Divine, and abstract influence was brought to bear on the heart of this “seller of purple.” In modern parlance: She got saved; she got religion. Need it be so? In comments on this very matter, the inimitable J.W. McGarvey says, “when an effect can be explained and accounted for by causes which are known to be present, it is illogical to assume a cause which is not known to be present.”¹ Mull over this principle; it is self-evident, sensible, simple, and profound.

Luke says,

And on the Sabbath day we went forth without the gate by a river side, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down, and spake unto the women that were come together. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, one that worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul. And...she was baptized... (Acts 16:13-15).

As to McGarvey’s “known causes,” we have such factors as: a teacher, teaching, and a potential convert hearing and heeding. Everything specifically

given here as part of Lydia’s conversion is the exact thing one finds in every other case of conversion. In light, then, of the things done by Paul and Lydia, how are we then to understand the phrase which says of Lydia “whose heart the Lord opened to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul”? Are there sufficient causes given right within the text to account for *how* God opened her heart. In short, Yes.

THE MOUSETRAP GAME. This was a kind of board game. Players moved around the board and landed on various squares, and according to directions erected, one-by-one, pieces of what would be a rather elaborate mousetrap. A player, by a specific action at the end of the game, would set in motion one of the pieces, which in turn triggered a chain of events; one of which, I vividly recall, was that of a ball rolling down a trough, which at some point caused a boot to kick something or another. The process went until at the end a cage fell over the mouse.

Who, or What caused the mouse to be caught? The answer is one of perspective. Looking at the trap in motion, one might say, “What caught the mouse was the little gizmo that tripped the latch which held the basket which then fell over the mouse.” Yet, another might say, “Wait a minute. The little gizmo to which you refer, couldn’t have tripped the latch which released the basket which caught the mouse, until the metal ball rolled down the trough and tripped yet a different gizmo.” But again, someone else might say, “Actually, the mouse was caught by a person, and that being the player who set the whole process into motion by pressing the first button.” or, A philosophic observer might chime in, “The guy who triggered the events which finally caught the mouse, couldn’t have done any of that were it not for the other players, at whose various turns of play, put into place one or more pieces of the trap.” And then, a really philosophic observer 1

— no doubt stroking his beard and peering over his bifocals— could say, “Ultimately, what caused the mouse to be caught was the person, or persons, who came up with the grand design for the game.” Enough already!

What of Lydia? What, or Who, caused her heart to be opened? In the ultimate sense, God, for the text flat out says the Lord “opened” her “heart.” But, like the mousetrap game, you need to back up several spaces in order to have the whole picture. In this case, we back up to Acts 16:6. Paul and his group had “gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia”; and whereas, “when they were come over against Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia...the Spirit of Jesus suffered them not.” Verses 9-10 say, “a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.” Finally, they made their way to “Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia.” Then we have the matters in verses 13-15 as set forth above.

Lydia was baptized, which as borne out in each instance of conversion in the Book of Acts, is the final step by which one converts or turns to the Lord. The act of baptism was one of the “things which were spoken by Paul” (v. 14). What caused Lydia to be baptized? The immediate answer is: “the Lord opened *her* [heart] to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” *How?* Through several means; let’s count:

1. The Spirit told Paul not to go preach in Phrygia and Galatia. Looking at the map, He in effect told Paul, Don’t turn right (v. 6) **2.** When Paul “assayed” to go northwest to Bithynia, the Spirit again said, No (v. 7). **3.** A prophetic vision “in the night” showed to Paul a man saying “come over to Macedonia and help us” (v. 9). **4.** “Straightway” Paul and party headed out, “con-

cluding [uh-oh: There’s that implication/inference stuff that some people just don’t like] that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (v. 10). **5.** Arriving in “Philippi,” the mission group was “in this city tarrying certain days” (v. 12). **6.** They wisely looked for conversion prospects on “the Sabbath” in a place which they “supposed...was a place of prayer” (v. 13). **7.** One who came there was Lydia, “one that worshipped God” (v. 14). **8.** They “spake.” **9.** Lydia “heard.” **10.** Thus, did the Lord “open” her “heart.” **11.** And thus did Lydia give “heed” to the “things which were spoken by Paul” by “being baptized.”

What was the *cause* of Lydia’s being baptized? The Lord opened her heart so that she obeyed the things Paul spoken by Paul. One might also say, “It was the Spirit who caused Lydia to be baptized because he told Paul not to go to Galatia to preach, where, had he gone, he wouldn’t have met Lydia.” It could also be said, “No it was the vision which Paul was given in which he saw the Macedonian saying, Come over and help us.” One could yet say, “No, it was Paul’s use of logic which, based on the content of the vision, caused him to conclude that the Lord wanted him to go and preach to the Macedonians.” or, yet another, “Well, it was also Paul’s wisdom in seeking out on the Sabbath a place where worshippers of God went to pray.” Yet again, what about, “It was the preaching done by Paul which converted Lydia.” or, “It was the earnest way Lydia listened to what Paul told her.”

All of these things are true as to Who, What, and How Lydia came to convert to the Lord. Finally, in the comprehensive sense, the Scripture wonderfully wraps up the whole affair into the sublime thought: “whose heart the Lord opened.” As per the axiom cited by McGarvey, there’s absolutely no need—it would in fact be irrational and illogical—to go fishing for some direct, Divine, and abstract force to explain the opening of Lydia’s heart, when right within the immediate →

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context (Acts 16:6-15), the Holy Spirit all but indexes for the reader the sufficient cause for both What God brought about in the life of this devout merchant from Thyatira, and How He did it.

There is no reason for anyone to read: “whose heart the lord opened,” and come away with some idea of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit in this woman’s conversion. Yes: God was the ultimate designer, arranger, and cause by which her heart was opened; but, the marvelous account of her conversion explains all the pieces, put in place by God, resulting finally in her obeying the gospel.

The part in the matter which brought things to a head was Paul’s preaching to her the “gospel which is the power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16). If you can understand and play the Mousetrap Game, you should be able to understand how it was that God “opened” Lydia’s “heart.”

—AA

¹ **Original Commentary On Acts**, p. 203.

SPECIAL NOTICE

We have a new e-mail address:
<walternaomi@bellsouth.net>

Our good and trusted friend, David Lemmons, has moved from the North Marshall congregation, to: 2214 Bellevue Road, Dublin, GA 31021. His new email address is: <davidlemmons@bellsouth.net> We miss David; he did, and does, so much for BOT. We hope for him to have a good and profitable work in his new place.

FOR YOUR ADDRESS BOOK

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