

PERSECUTION OF THE SAINTS

In the very end of this age, the Sovereign God's earthly children will suffer great persecution and be hated because of their proclamation of the gospel message.

Will today's professing Christian community be the ones that are persecuted, or will most professing Christians today be the ones doing the persecuting? The biblical answer to this question may surprise you, because it is not what is taught in most professing Christian churches today.

AN UNPOPULAR MESSAGE

The good news from the Sovereign God is a message of tremendous hope for humanity and it offers the promise of awesome physical, spiritual, and eternal rewards that are almost beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend. However, the good news that Jesus Christ brought from his Heavenly Father, is not a popular message.

Although God the Father's good news message promises awesome and wonderful benefits of a future containing safety, security, happiness, and prosperity under his loving care and protection, it has never been a popular message. Even when Jesus, the apostles, and the early church preached it, it was not enthusiastically received; only a few believed this awesome and wonderful truth and made it a part of their life experience.

1. But, why is this wonderful message not accepted by all who hear it?
2. Why is it so misunderstood and maligned by those who should rejoice at hearing it?
3. Why was Jesus Christ crucified and why were most of the apostles and many of the early church murdered for preaching this dynamic and wonderful message?
4. Why will many be murdered just before the return of Jesus Christ for preaching this truly astounding message?

The answers to these four questions all have to do with true belief in the originator of the message, the original messenger, the message itself, the requirement to change from evil to righteous behavior, and the threat of punishment for non-compliance to the message.

It is not the gospel's promise of great and wonderful benefits that most people have a problem with, and it is not this promise that causes them to dislike the message and its messengers. It is the gospel's condemnation of evil behavior, its authoritative nature, and its demand that people conform to its prerequisite terms and conditions prior to being granted its wonderful benefits.

These are the things that most people cannot tolerate about the Father's message of good news.

THE NECESSITY TO CHANGE

There are many reasons why the Father's good news message is thought of by most people as bad news. However, the biggest reason for people's hatred of the Father's good news message has to do with change. In order to reap the benefits that are promised in the good news message, one is required to make many profound changes in one's attitude, behavior, and lifestyle.

The gospel message demands a change from unrighteousness to righteousness as defined by God's word in the Holy Bible. It is this demand and the threat of eternal punishment for non-compliance that is the major cause of most people's hatred of the gospel message and its messengers:

The prophet Isaiah was told to:

"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob [national Israel] their sins" (Isa.58:1 KJV).

Isaiah was also told to give the following invitation and warning message from the Creator God to the Israelites and to people in general. God said through Isaiah:

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be as crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land: But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it" (Isa.1:18-20 Para.).

The good news message that Jesus brought and that the early church taught, and that is to be taught just before Christ returns, demands true belief and obedience. It demands a change in attitude and behavior. It demands that people choose good over evil, truth over lies, and righteousness over unrighteousness. It demands a change from rebellion against the Father's laws, precepts, and principles to obedience to his ways:

Jesus said that one must repent and believe the good news.

"After John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, saying, The time is at hand: repent and believe the gospel" (Mk.1:14-15 Para.).

Although there was much proof available to the Jews during Jesus' ministry that he was indeed the Messiah who came with great power and authority from the Father, there were very, very few who believed his message of repentance. Very few thought that they needed to change their attitude and behavior toward God and their fellow man, because most of these people thought there was nothing wrong with their attitude and behavior. As many of the scriptures indicate, the Jews were perfectly happy with their spiritual condition and were only looking to better their physical circumstances. This same condition exists today among people of all religions, philosophies, and political persuasions.

Repentance requires a person to change beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in respect to sin (and sin is the violation of God's law). A person must stop violating God's law and begin to obey its precepts and principles.

The apostle John was inspired to record:

"Sin is the transgression of the law" (1.Jn.3:4 Para.), And he that says, I know him [the Father], and does not keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1.Jn.2:4 Para.).

Human Nature

Human nature is the opposite of God's nature; therefore, it results in the hatred of the things of God. The way of God is opposite to the way most humans want to live. The vast majority of people today do not love truth; they love evil. The conditions of today's world are a direct result of the disobedience of God's laws, statutes, judgments, precepts, and principles that, if practiced, will bring true happiness and prosperity.

The demand for a change from unrighteousness to righteousness contained in the gospel message is why the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day hated him—the messenger. He taught the truth of God, and because they were not obedient to this truth, Jesus' life and words condemned them as unrighteous enemies of God.

The same conditions exist today among most quasi-Christian and Jewish sects. Most will say that they either believe the teachings of Jesus Christ, the entire Bible, the Book of the Law, the Writings and/or the Prophets, yet most do not truly live in obedience to what they profess to believe:

Jesus called the religious leaders of his day "hypocrites, snakes, evil, and corrupt men." He called them these things because they were not teaching the total truth of God. Instead, they were teaching half truths and their own philosophies that were in opposition to the truth of God. See Matt.3:7; 12:33-34.

Rebellion and Self-Will

Mankind is rebellious by nature: Adam and Eve rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden; the children of Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, and they continue to rebel today. It is this rebellion against God and his ways that has caused the world's great ills.

During Noah's generation, people were so evil that God decided to eliminate the entire human race, except for Noah and his family. Noah was found to be the only righteous individual in all of humanity. Jesus said that this same condition would prevail at the end of the age. Just as the people in Noah's day did not listen to the call to repentance and the warnings of God's wrath, neither will the vast majority of people listen to God's servants in the end of this age. See Gen.6:5-13.

Rebellion comes in many forms and always separates the rebellious from God the Father and Jesus Christ. Today's multitude of religions, philosophies, and political/governmental systems are examples of people's desire to obey their own self-will rather than the will of God.

Freedom of Choice

Since the rebellion of Adam and Eve, God has allowed humanity to go its own way in order to teach the lessons that can only be taught through time and experience. God has also allowed the evil being who originally deceived the first humans to have limited control of the earth and its inhabitants for this same reason.

The World Today

The clear facts of history and the existing unacceptable condition of today's world speak volumes about past and present religions, philosophies, and governmental systems, and the evils that they produce.

God the Father has brought all of these before his heavenly throne and found them all guilty of being the cause of all the ills of humanity. Yes, there are some good things that have been produced by various religions, philosophies, and governmental systems. However, the end result of these systems is the horrible conditions we see in the world today. The end result of humanity's effort to rule itself has been disastrous.

Humanity has experienced the results of centuries of living in rebellion to God's laws and way of life. And the next phase of God's plan for humanity is

about to begin.

In the near future, humans will cease to have their own religions, philosophies and political and governmental systems, because humanity is about to meet the Creator. Jesus Christ is coming back to rule the earth with great power, in order to eliminate the barriers to peace, happiness, and productivity. When he comes, he will provide humanity with the opportunity to learn about God the Father and his way to eternal life.

PROPHECIES OF PERSECUTION

The Bible teaches that the Kingdom of God will not come peacefully. It also teaches that great persecution will come upon those who teach the truth of God prior to Christ's return. Jesus understood mankind's nature as no other person could. As the Creator God of humanity (Jn.1:1-3; Eph.3:9), he observed human behavior for centuries and knew people would continue to oppose the way of God as long as they had a carnal nature and were influenced by evil. See Rom.8:7. The following scriptures are about this important issue:

Jesus said: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn.15:20 Para.). And,

"I have told you these things so that you will not become shaken in your faith [by what lies ahead]. For they will put you out of the synagogue, and indeed the hour is coming when those who murder you will think that they are serving God, because they have never known the Father or me" (Jn.16:1-3 Para.).

Paul said, "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2.Tim.3:12 Para.). See also Mk.13:13; Lk.21:17.

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Before Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, he said some things about his disciple's existence on earth that seemed very strange to them. He said:

"If the world hate you, you know that it hated me

before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn.15:18-19 KJV).

Jesus expressed his deep love and affection for his disciples and their mission. He also told them of the power to which they would have access and the love that they should have for each other. After this, he revealed the kind of beings they would become after their transformation into sons of his Heavenly Father and the persecution that they would receive after this transformation.

Jesus was not speaking philosophically to his disciples about their earthly status. He said they were alien to the other human life-forms on earth. He spoke of the New Creation that they had been chosen to be a part of as if it were already a reality at that moment in time. This is yet another reason that people do not understand the elect of God. The elect of God are not only different in their world view, they are different in their spiritual make-up; therefore, the world cannot relate to them as they do to their own kind.

If you want to know exactly what the Sovereign Father's new creation is, get a copy of my study about those who are of the new creation.

Hated by the World

Notice what Jesus said to his Father in prayer about those who would follow the ways of God: in John chapter 17, verse 14 about those who would follow the ways of God. Jesus said:

"I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (Jn.17:14-Para.).

Unless Jesus Christ was a false prophet, the world at large will surely come to hate and then persecute God's true followers for preaching the true gospel message just prior to his return.

But why were those who followed Jesus hated and why will those who truly follow Jesus today hated by the world? The answer is really quite simple

when one understands that Satan has deceived the entire world into following his religious and governmental systems that are in opposition to the Father's religion and governmental system.

The Bible clearly says that all of humanity, except the elect of God, have come under the deceptive influence of this incredibly powerful and evil being and his evil worship systems, philosophies, and governmental systems. See Rev.12:9; 2.Cor.4:4.

While recording God's condemnation of the behavior of the Israelitish people throughout the centuries, Isaiah was inspired to say:

"Woe to them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa.5:20 KJV).

People's own natural inclination for self-gratification, along with the influence of Satan and his evil cohorts has done such a thorough job of deceiving people, that in today's world, most people honestly do not know the difference between good and evil.

This is yet another reason why those who proclaim the true gospel message will be hated, persecuted, and murdered. Jesus said:

"And indeed the hour is coming when those who murder you will think that they are serving God" (Jn.16:2 Para.).

Sincere people who believe that they are worshiping the true God will continue to hate, persecute, and murder those who are, in reality, true sons of God. They will continue to do this because they are deceived and do not know that the god or gods that they worship are in reality evil spirits who oppose the true God.

The ways of God are opposite to the way most people want to behave toward him and their fellow man. Jesus was murdered for teaching the truth of God, and John the Baptist was beheaded because he spoke out against Herod's sin of adultery (Mk.6:17-28). It is no different today. Most people

do not like to be told they are living in sin and they usually dislike people who tell them of their evil condition.

Jesus told his disciples "If they call the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more those of his household?" (Matt.10:24-25 para.).

During Jesus' lifetime, he was the highest representative of the Kingdom of God on earth; however, the Jews accused him of being possessed of an evil spirit and being Beelzebub, the prince of evil spirits. Jesus said that all those who truly represent the Father and Kingdom of God as his servants would also be perceived as evil and accused of being possessed of and/or influenced by evil spirits.

It is a fact of history that after Jesus' death and resurrection, Jewish religious leaders and later quasi-Christians did persecute the early church. They called them servants of a great and powerful evil spirit, just as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' lifetime had leveled this accusation against him.

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

Matthew 24:8-12 Paraphrased

After listing many of the earth-shaking events that will announce his eminent return to conquer the earth, Jesus said, "And these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to affliction, and will kill you: and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake" (vs. 8-9)

The time frame of this prophecy is very near Christ's return, which is during the time when some of the elect of God will be an organized body of believers who proclaim the gospel with great spiritual power.

The reason for this hatred being directed against the elect of God is that, they truly believe in the name of Christ and the authority and power behind his name. For My Name's Sake

Many assume that Jesus was loved or at least liked by most people of his day, and that he was only hated by the Jewish religious leaders. But, this is

not true. Although many came to hear him teach, see him heal people, and work miracles, very few believed what he said. The general population of Jesus' day did not truly understand the word of God or the prophecies concerning the Messiah. Because of this, they were easily influenced by their religious leaders to disregard the teachings of Jesus. The evidence that the religious leaders were easily able to sway popular opinion against Jesus is found in the events that surround his trial and crucifixion.

Because of a lack of a true understanding of the word of God and an unwillingness to obey the truth of God, Jewish sects and quasi-Christians of today, also hate Jesus' teachings and those who teach this truth through Jesus' name and authority.

Because of the punitive nature of the gospel message's warning and witness to the world. It is really no wonder that the elect of God will be hated by the majority who hear the message that they proclaim.

Just as the Jews of Jesus' day professed to believe in God and hated Jesus for what he taught, so is it in this age and so will it be in the future. Some of God's people will be hated, persecuted, and murdered for practicing and teaching God's truth. This is the major reason that those who truly follow the teachings of the Bible will be hated and persecuted by Quasi-Christianity just before Christ returns.

Popular Christianity

There are over 20,000 different groups and organizations that profess to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ. All of these feel that their particular interpretation of Jesus' teachings and the Bible is acceptable to God.

Because both the Old and New Testaments record that there is only one faith and one method of worship that is acceptable to God, logic tells us that, if any one of these thousands of differing groups is correct in their worship of God, then all the others are incorrect and stand condemned as worshiping a false gods.

Let me restate what I said a little differently, so that there will be no doubt as to what I am saying.

Those who truly follow the teachings of God the Father and Jesus Christ teach that there is only one way to worship the true God and only one way to obtain salvation, and that those who teach another way of worship and salvation are worshiping a false god(s).

Therefore, it is very easy to understand why quasi-Christianity hate those who truly believe in and follow the teachings of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Hated by Judaism

Those of the various Jewish sects, for the most part, believe that Jesus Christ was a prophet or a good man, but none believe that he was the Creator God or the Son of God, nor do they believe that he was the Messiah. However, a major part of the gospel message teaches that Jesus Christ is the Creator God and the Son of God, and that the Sovereign God sent Jesus to cancel the first covenant with national Israel and replace it with a new one.

Both the Old and New Testaments and the words of Jesus condemn Judaism as a perversion of the original writings of the word of God. Therefore, it is no wonder that those of the various Jewish sects feel that anyone who believes in or follows the teachings of Jesus are their enemies and worshipers of a pagan god.

Christianity and Judaism

Both quasi-Christians and people of Jewish faith who profess to worship the true God but whose lives and teachings are not harmonious with the truth of God always have a great deal of disdain and hatred for those who actually worship God in truth, love, and obedience. Jesus says these individuals who hate his followers are evil and corrupt.

Jesus said that a person cannot worship the Sovereign God through a man made system of beliefs. He said to the spiritual leaders of his day:

"Hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying, This people draws near to me with their mouth, and with their lips honor me; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the ordinances of men" (Matt.15:7-9 Para.). See Isa.29:13; Ezk.33:31-32.

Jesus called the religious leaders of the Jews, "hypocrites, snakes, evil and corrupt men," because they were not teaching the total truth of God. Instead, they were teaching half-truths and their own perverted philosophy that was in opposition to God's word. The same can be said for the quasi-Christian and Jewish sects of today. Both claim to be obedient to the word of God; however, their actions and the results of their teachings are far different from what the Bible says they should be, if they were truly worshiping the true God and living according to his ways.

Jesus said that people are either justified or condemned by what they say. He said:

"But I say to you, That every idle word that men speak, they shall give account for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you are justified, and by your words you are condemned" (Matt.12:36-37 Para.).

The words of those who only pretend to worship the true God condemn them for what they really are. People can fool other people as to their true beliefs and intentions, but they cannot fool God. Hence, Jesus gave his condemnation of the religious leaders of his day who were, in reality, only pretending to worship the true God:

Jesus also said, "Why come to me and call me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" (Lk.6:46 Para.) See Lk.6:43-45.

Those who truly follow God's laws are to speak out as Jesus did and condemn those who falsely claim to worship the true God. This is yet another reason that the elect of God will be hated and persecuted.

Hated by all Religions

Those who truly believe that the biblical record is the printed word of God should also believe the

biblical teaching that there are only two religions in the world: The religion of God the Father who is Sovereign of all that does exist and the religion of God's enemies who are separated into three basic divisions: Quasi-Christianity, Judaism, and all other religions.

Because of this belief, it is little wonder that those who truly believe that they are the only true worshipers of the only true God and his Son will be hated by all religions of the world today. It is interesting that this is the same basic reason that the ancient nation of Israel was hated and persecuted by other nations.

Hated by Governments

Remember that Jesus was not persecuted by the Roman government; he was persecuted by those who said they were worshipping the one true God. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the early church existed for many years without being persecuted by the Romans or any other government.

During the time of the apostles and the early church, persecution always came from the Jews or other religions. It was only after the Romans and other governments perceived the followers of Christ as a political threat, that they began to persecute them.

During the time of the end, the elect of God will claim to be the only ones worshipping the true God, and they will also claim to be the only true representatives of the Government of God on earth, as did Jesus and the early church. Because the Sovereign God's true worshipers will be proclaiming that the government of God is about to begin its rule over all the earth. This will cause them to be hated by governments as well as the people of other religions.

Hated by all Israel

The Tribes of Israel have always been a rebellious people who have seldom heeded the warnings of God's prophets and servants. As the end of this age approaches, and God's earthly children proclaim the true gospel message along with its warning and

witness to the Israelites scattered throughout the world, they will respond to God in the same way that they always have in the past. They will respond with hatred and violence toward God's prophets and those who follow them.

The prophet Isaiah was inspired to record the harsh reality concerning the attitudes and mind-set of the people of Israel toward God. The comments God made about his chosen people are as true today as they were when Isaiah recorded them centuries ago:

Isaiah 30:1-15 LPB

God said, "Woe to my rebellious children, says the Lord; you ask advice from everyone but me, and decide to do what I don't want you to do. You yoke yourselves with unbelievers, thus piling up your sins. . . Now go and write down this word of mine concerning Egypt [Egypt is symbolic of sin as well as a literal nation], so that it will stand until the end of time, forever and forever, as an indictment of Israel's unbelief. For if you don't write it, they will claim I never warned them. "Oh, no," they will say, "you never told us that!" For they are stubborn rebels, They tell my prophets, "Shut up—we don't want any more of your reports!" They say, "Don't tell us the truth; tell us nice things; tell us lies. Forget all this gloom; we've heard more than enough about your 'Holy One of Israel' and all he says" (vs.1-11).

It should not come as a great surprise that all of the politicians, military leaders, and governmental officials of the Israelitish nations scattered around the world will hate the elect of God, because the elect of God will be preaching the same message of repentance that God's prophets have always preached to Israel.

God said through the Prophet Isaiah:

"This is the reply of the Holy One of Israel: Because you despise what I tell you and trust instead in frauds and lies and won't repent, therefore calamity will come upon you suddenly, as upon a bulging wall that bursts and falls; and in one moment crashes down. God will smash you like a broken dish; he will not act sparingly. Not a piece will be

left large enough to use for carrying coals from the hearth, or a little water from the well. For the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, says: Only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved; in quietness and confidence is your strength; but you will have none of this" (vs.12-15).

Another reason for the Israelitish people's hatred and persecution of the elect of God in the end of the age is that, the elect of God will be teaching that God the Father is punishing the descendants of Israel throughout the world for their continuing rebellion against him and his physical and spiritual laws of behavior.

SUMMARY

Why was Jesus Christ persecuted for preaching his Heavenly Father's message of good news? Why were most of the apostles along with many of the early church martyred? And why will many be murdered just before the return of Jesus Christ for preaching the truly astounding message that Jesus taught?

Jesus and the apostle Paul give these answers:

Jesus said: "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (Jn.15:20 Para.). And Paul said: "And all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2.Tim.3:12 Para.). See also Mk.13:13; Lk.21:17.

The persecution of the elect of God is a self-fulfilling prophecy, because of their obedience to the command of Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel message. The elect of God will be hated and persecuted because they will be doing as Jesus instructed. They will be preaching and teaching the good news message of repentance from evil, true belief in God the Father and Jesus Christ and the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

The gospel message that Jesus brought from the Father is a message that is so dynamic, so powerful, and so diametrically opposed to what has been taught by this world's religious leaders and philosophers that the vast majority of people will reject it when they hear it and hate and persecute

those who live it and teach it.

Jesus says to let one's light shine (Matt.5:14-16). However, when one does this, one cannot help but bring persecution upon one's self.

Today, just before the return of Jesus Christ to conquer the earth and establish his Father's religion and government over the earth, the Father's true servants must proclaim his good news message just as Jesus did centuries ago.

The basic reasons for the persecution of the elect are not complex or difficult to understand. Revealing the true condition of the world and laying the blame at the feet of those who are responsible for these horrible conditions will indeed bring persecution.

The understanding of the good news message from God the Father has been revealed to his earthly children who live in a world that is almost totally devoid of his truth. The Father's children are told to preach this awesome truth with zeal and without reservation, regardless of the danger associated with preaching it and the real possibility of being murdered for believing and preaching it.

All who hear the Father's good news message are held responsible for their response to it. Those who hear the message with understanding and truly believe it will be spared from eternal death; however, those who hear with understanding and turn their back on the opportunity that is offered will suffer eternal death (Rom.6:23).

Jesus said, "You go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; and he that does not believe shall be damned" (Mk.16:15-16 Para.).

I see that my time is up, if you want to know more about God the Father's true good news message or the other subjects that I have briefly touched on in this in this broadcast, Write to me at the address given in the following announcement. Until next time this is Bud Cocherell for Bible Research .org.

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