

PREPARING FOR PERSECUTION

It is my firm conviction that the modern Evangelical church will soon face direct persecution in America. It has already begun in other parts of the world. In fact, some have estimated that more believers have died for their faith in Christ in this century than in the era of the early church. But such physical martyrdom has not often taken place in the U.S. Though no one prays for martyrdom physical persecution in this country would rejuvenate the witness of the body of Christ.

It is interesting to note that the recent killings in the high school in Colorado and the shootings in a Ft. Worth, Texas church had some elements of martyrdom. When one of the killers learned he was pointing his weapon at a Christian teenager, with great glee and relish he dispatched her out of this life. In a more direct way, the killings in the Ft. Worth church were fueled by a clear hatred of Christianity. Though some may argue that the killers in both cases were mentally unstable, nevertheless their anti-God sentiments were expressed long before these terrible events took place.

Though I'm certainly not a prophet, I predict that within ten years American Christians will be facing a much more widespread baptism of fire. It may begin with more intense legal and religious ostracizations in order to smother our witness. It will then move to persecutions on the job. More public expressions of Christianity, such as take place around Christmas, will be limited. And finally, though we say this will never happen in America, outright physical suffering may come about.

If we but look back at how quickly the influence of Christianity has been curtailed, I believe we all will have to ponder, could such persecution actually happen to us? Looking at the New Testament and the history of the early church, we see that persecution was normative and not unusual. For believers in Christ, it was expected. Before the rapture of the church to glory, I believe hatred and persecution against believers will sharply increase.

Peter reminds us to expect fiery ordeals and testing (1 Pet. 4:12-14, 19). He adds that such trials are not to be taken as strange "but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing." Further, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

It must be remembered that God is sovereign in history. If these things come upon us, we are but one of many generations that will have so suffered for our Lord. Peter reminds us of His providence concerning this bitter cup that may be our lot here at the end of the church age: "Therefore let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right." -Mal Couch