

God's News In The News

Week One Hundred Seventy-One

End Time Persecution Is Coming

It's Nothing New

The serpent was the craftiest of all the creatures the Lord God had made. So the serpent came to the woman. "Really?" he asked. "None of the fruit in the garden? God says you mustn't eat any of it?" (Gen 3:1, TLB)

From the founding of religion people have been hostile to any belief system that crimps their style. Actually, one could say that this antipathy to God goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden where the serpent questioned whether God really told the truth to Adam and Eve. One could say that this was just a discussion and not violence was intended but tell that to this early couple who had to leave paradise and live in a world where hard labor was the only way to survive, and where one son would kill another for a difference of how to worship and serve God. History is replete with those who love God and those who love to hate God and by extension, hate those who love Him and dedicate their lives to Him. Religious persecution isn't a new thing, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Early Christians Were Persecuted

But Paul, threatening with every breath and eager to destroy every Christian, went to the High Priest in Jerusalem. 2 He requested a letter addressed to synagogues in Damascus, requiring their cooperation in the persecution of any believers he found there, both men and women, so that he could bring them in chains to Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1, TLB)

Jesus was only gone a short time before the early church faced harsh resistance from the religious community and the political powers that be where they lived. And as this infant movement spread, so did the hatred for it and those who resisted it. From the very same Jews Jesus came to save rose a man who should have known better because he was well versed in the Scriptures that predicted. This man even boasted that he was a Jew that lived above reproach in his fervor to live out his Jewish faith:

Yet if anyone ever had reason to hope that he could save himself, it would be I. If others could be saved by what they are, certainly I could! 5 For I went through the Jewish initiation ceremony when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish home that was a branch of the old original Benjamin family. So I was a real Jew if there ever was one! What's more, I was a member of the Pharisees who demand the strictest obedience to every Jewish law and custom. 6 And sincere? Yes, so much so that I greatly persecuted the Church; and I tried to obey every Jewish rule and regulation right down to the very last point. (Phil 3:4-6, TLB)

Cruel Roman Leaders

If anyone felt the brunt of religious hatred, it was the 12 disciples or apostles who were chosen by Jesus to build His church. Of these men, all but one was martyred, although they tried to kill him as well. The Apostle John was thrown into a vat of burning hot oil and according to tradition miraculously survived. Many, many other Christians, like the twelve had to face the persecution of a Roman government which was loathe to have such brave adherents dare come against worshipping their leader. Here is how author *Bruce Eastwood* in an article from the web site *historytoday.com* describes the persecution:

Under Nero (54-68) occurred the first persecution of a 'new and mischievous superstition', as Suetonius described it. Christians were not necessarily culpable for the fire of A.D. 64 in Rome, according to Tacitus, but they were viewed with high suspicion as a group with 'degraded and shameful practices', holding to 'a foreign and deadly superstition'; certainly they evidenced 'antisocial tendencies'.

Antisocial tendencies sure sounds like a familiar charge being thrown at Christians in our society, and in America today. But it wasn't always this way. Far from it.

A Country Of Religious Freedom

One of the main reasons that people came to America was to get away from religious persecution. And you can see this woven in our founding documents that freedom of religion is a staple of the very things we hold dear. While many citizens can't recite the freedoms mentioned in our founders' words, it nevertheless is there and still has a great influence on our society. But you wouldn't know it by recent actions taken by school boards in Arizona and California. In the case of a Phoenix school district where they are experiencing a teacher shortage, a 5 year contract with a Christian college that allows its student to intern in the district to get experience was cancelled because they held beliefs that made the council members feel unsafe. In a [foxnews.com](https://www.foxnews.com/media/arizona-school-board-member-district-should-reject-hiring-teachers-with-christian-values-not-safe) article by reporter *Hannah Grossman* (see <https://www.foxnews.com/media/arizona-school-board-member-district-should-reject-hiring-teachers-with-christian-values-not-safe>) from March 3rd of this year, the board voted to dissolve the agreement because the college doesn't agree with the LGBT agenda and dares to proselytize: *During the meeting, school board member Tamillia Valenzuela blasted the university over its Christian beliefs and said she was "disheartened" to learn about the contract that had been ongoing for five years.*

Valenzuela describes herself as "a bilingual, disabled, neurodivergent Queer Black Latina... who loves a good hot wing (but only with the right ranch) and things that sparkle."

"While I full-heartedly believe in the religious freedom and people being able to practice whatever faith that they have, I had some concerns regarding looking at this particular institution," she said. "And I think it's a really good time for us to take a moment and really pause about where our values lie ... And while I understand we are currently in a situation across the nation that we have a teacher shortage and recruiting... is really difficult," she said.

"My concerns, [is] when I go to Arizona Christian University's website, [they are] 'committed to Jesus Christ, accomplishing his will and advancements on earth as in Heaven ... "Part of their values is... [to] 'transform the culture with truth by promoting the Biblically-informed values that are foundational to Western civilization, including the centrality of family, traditional sexual morality, and lifelong marriage between one man and one woman,'" she said.

"I want to know how bringing [teachers] from an institution that is ingrained in their values so directly brings impact to three of your board members who are a part of the LGBT community."

Church Kicked Out In California

Moving on to California we also see a church that was paying to use a school to hold their services on the weekend was turned away simply for worshipping Jesus. In a February 25th article in the *LA Times* (see <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-02-25/scripps-ranch-canyon-springs-church-lgbtq-thurgood-marshall>) journalist *Kristen Taketa* reported that the kerfuffle arose when the church located in Scripps Ranch, had a speaker who dared to say that

being a homosexual was wrong. The church has met in the school for 20+ years in the San Diego area with no protests up until that time. If you see a trend, you are right. Christianity is ok until you preach or teach against the LGBT agenda and then it's absolutely wrong and harmful. According to the article, the pastor just wanted to help his congregation understand the issue: *Pastor Jack Hawkins, who founded Canyon Springs Church 25 years ago, said he had hoped it would start a conversation that would lead to healing and show his members how to better love their LGBTQ neighbors.*

Those in the community who probably never even knew the church existed, signed a petition to have the church ousted even though such meetings are not prohibited as noted in this quote: *According to Eugene Volokh, a constitutional law professor at UCLA School of Law, school districts are not allowed to deny renting their facilities to a church or any other organization based on the group's opinions, because they constitute free speech.*

"The answer's open and shut. The school district cannot constitutionally discriminate based on viewpoint in its decisions about whom to rent things to," he said.

The exception, Volokh said, would be if an organization used a facility for speech that doesn't fall under free speech protection, such as making threats of violence.

Interestingly enough, another school in California is allowing a Satanist group to meet there after hours (see <https://www.sacbee.com/news/california/article269038922.html>).

Rapture Ready?

If you believe in the Rapture and the Millennium, well tread carefully in Australia, too.

According to the Queensland's Counter-Terrorism Investigative and Intelligence Unit (see <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/australia-police-say-december-shooting-in-queensland-was-religiously-motivated-terrorist-attack/2821689>) a shooting was done by people who "... were motivated by a Christian extremist ideology and subscribed to the broad Christian fundamentalist belief system known as Pre-Millennialism," the police official said.

It is unclear why the violent dispute occurred, but the police officers were apparently following up on a missing person's report. but these officials seem to think it was because of their biblical view. The shooters held other views that led them to isolate themselves as they appeared to be preparing to endure a time when their views would cut them off from supplies for a time.

Unfortunately, having the same beliefs as unhinged people will get us lumped in with them to many in the media.

It Will Only Get Worse

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. (John 15:18, NLT)

And this isn't my opinion, it's from Jesus Himself. I'm not advocating for violence, nor am I condoning we support people who are definitely unbalanced and deceived. But we must not be naïve enough to think that we'll avoid persecution simply because we are nice and loving. When the very Bible we follow is seen as hate speech the proverbial walls are closing in around us more and more. I don't want you to fall into the pit of despair over this growing anti-Christian movement, though. Here is how author *Tim Moore* advises us:

How do we as Christians thrive and survive in a world that is hostile to our faith? Well, first of all, we keep our focus on Jesus Christ. Trust that Jesus has overcome the world. Knowing this, we do not let our hearts be troubled. Rather, we speak out, acting as salt and light in an increasingly dark place. Until the Rapture occurs, this is our responsibility. We're not to cower and hide, rather we're bold about our faith and are ready to give a defense to anyone who asks why we believe what we do. Our faith is not based on opinion, rather it's based on the Word of God, and that has power.

I could not have said it better.