

Mostly Personal...

Loved Ones,

As promised last week, I want to address the issue of Persecution in this week's *Mostly Personal*.

Let me begin by saying that if we do not take time to seek The LORD for ourselves concerning issues like this, we will always be in danger of simply responding to someone else's burden/vision — and that often leads to trouble. When God places a revelation in someone's heart, it is almost impossible for them to deliver the word in *pure form*. We almost always editorialize, exaggerate, or interpret what we've received — and often (very often) our own unresolved fears, hurts, and trauma taint the message.

Any opinion such as I am offering, and even a message presented as *prophetic* in nature, must be sifted thoroughly in the presence of God. It is up to each of us to individually process the heart of the message.

And one final warning before I get into the heart of the matter. If we harbor fear, hatred, and anger toward those who oppose us — we are in danger of making our suffering and rejection a self-fulfilling prophecy. We will find persecution and rejection where there is none unless you carry all of this into the Lord's presence and embrace the Fellowship of His Sufferings.

It is my opinion that persecution is coming in increasing measure, though we know it is already on the rise and gaining momentum. As with every other dynamic of The Long Emergency, I believe we can mitigate the severity and duration of any suffering. At this point, I think I'm seeing three levels of persecution in the approaching storm.

(1) The first and most far reaching form of persecution is on a social level. The Book of Revelation says the greatest persecution mankind has ever known will have its foundation on a societal level. Those who refuse to worship the Beast and accept his mark will not be allowed to interact with society — they cannot buy or sell. That is the end result of social persecution, but it has begun as mockery and cruelty with words. It is no longer acceptable to be a Christian in many social circles and on many social networking tools. Those who acknowledge our right to be a Christian usually say we need to keep our faith in our homes or churches. Even that is now being attacked, though, because the phrase often used to describe God's Word when preached from a pulpit is "Hate Speech." Look for more verbal cruelty and more intense pressure upon our children to conform to a societal standard that is often in direct contradiction to what is being taught at home.

(2) The second level of persecution is legal. I truly hope our lawmakers will step up and prove me wrong, but be on the look-out for

a stranglehold of laws and regulations to curtail civil liberties in general and religious freedom in particular. Unless something changes, lawsuits over *hate-speech*, religious *prejudice*, and related issues will make it very difficult for churches and para-church ministries to stay in business. Unless the climate changes quickly, *very quickly*, churches will lose their tax-exempt status, and your contributions to charitable organizations will no longer be deductible. We are in such a litigious culture that many churches and ministries (as well as businesses and individuals) may be forced into bankruptcy in an effort to simply defend themselves in a hostile environment.

(3) The third level of persecution is physical. I still find this difficult to imagine in America, yet Christians for 2,000 years have suffered beatings, imprisonment, and death. Sometimes it is mob-driven; at other times it is state-sponsored. I pray and hope such a day may never touch our beloved nation. I advise you read ***When A Nation Forgets God*** by Erwin Lutzer. Read it on your knees — and learn the lesson of Nazi Germany. I personally think this form of persecution may not be as pronounced as it has been in other places simply because of the residual decency of America, but we will continue praying.

So, what do we do?

1. We pray. Keep making ***AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN*** — (order sermon from the Christian Life Bookstore).
2. Do everything to ensure generational transfer. Pray for, train, and talk to your children. Teach them to stand firm in faith and to be strong in The Lord and in His mighty strength.
3. Remember that some may trust in horses; some may trust in chariots, but we will trust in the Name of our God.
4. With all your external preparation — get your spiritual side prepared first!
5. Stay in the Lord's presence until you know His voice better than your own!

I love you,
Pastor Stephen