

PREPARING TO SUFFER AS A CHRISTIAN IN A POST-COVID,  
POST-CHRISTIAN WORLD

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?



# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- A Christian baker who believes it would be wrong to bake a cake for a gay wedding
- A Christian operator of a women's homeless shelter who refused to admit a biological male
- A Christian counselor who does not want to advocate for transition-affirming therapies but instead help the person accept the body God gave him or her

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- Argument 1: “It is not religious persecution because the government is not specifically targeting religions/religious people.”
- Argument 2: “It is not religious persecution because the pastor/church could have found other ways to conform to the government restrictions.”

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- Argument 3: “It is not religious persecution because they are wrong to come to the conclusion they have, i.e., this is not behavior that a Christian is compelled to do, and, thus, cannot be Christian persecution.”

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 1 Pet 2:19-20
- If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. 1 Pet 4:14-16

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind....I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ...The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin Rom 14:5, 14, 22-23

# WHAT COUNTS AS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION?

- Is the person facing this hardship because they are acting in a way they are convinced they must act in order to properly honor Christ? If so, then they are suffering “as a Christian.”



# KINDS OF PERSECUTION

- Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted 2 Tim 3:12
- Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Matt 5:11

# KINDS OF PERSECUTION

- But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Heb 10:23-24

# KINDS OF PERSECUTION

- Choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Heb 11:25-26
- Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Heb 11:35b-38

# KINDS OF PERSECUTION

- So that when they speak against you as evildoers 1 Pet 2:12b
- Having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.  
1 Pet 3:16
- With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you 1 Pet 4:4
- If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 1 Pet 4:14

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- It is largely outside of your control
  - 35% of Americans are “born-again” but only 23% read the Bible in the last week and believe it is accurate in all it teaches.
  - Only 7% affirm the following:
    - Saying their faith is very important in their life today
    - Believing they have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians
    - Believing that Satan exists
    - Believing that Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth
    - Believing that eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works
    - Describing God as the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- What is the “evangelical” or “public” witness?
  - Does opposition to biological males participating in sports help or hurt that witness? Depends on the audience.

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- The world will never view Christians favorably
  - If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. Jn 15:18-20
  - Utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Mt 5:11b

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- The “evangelical witness” matters less than your personal reputation
  - If “evangelicals” had a great reputation but you were a jerk, people would be unlikely to listen to you.
  - If “evangelicals” had a bad reputation but you, by your faithful lifestyle, demonstrate godliness and integrity then people would be more likely to listen to you.
  - What kind of reputation does your church have in your community? People do not encounter or engage with “evangelicals.” They encounter you and your fellow church members.



# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- Christianity will at times be disruptive
  - We should be known as those who strive to submit to those as servants of God, and anytime we believe we cannot submit to the government, we must do so in a way that still seeks to honor government officials
  - But consider how often the apostles were charged with disrupting social order and speaking against the law because they were calling people to worship Jesus

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and they set up false witnesses who said, “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law” Acts 6:12-13
- But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. Acts 14:4
- And when they had brought them to the magistrates, they said, “These men are Jews, and they are disturbing our city. They advocate customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice.” Acts 16:20-21

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things. Acts 17:6-8
- But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, saying, “This man is persuading people to worship God contrary to the law.” Acts 18:12-13

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- Then all the city was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion. He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks. And when he came to the steps, he was actually carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the crowd, for the mob of the people followed, crying out, “Away with him!” Acts 21:30-36

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- And as they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, the tribune ordered him to be brought into the barracks, saying that he should be examined by flogging, to find out why they were shouting against him like this. Acts 22:23-24
- Then a great clamor arose, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees' party stood up and contended sharply, “We find nothing wrong in this man. What if a spirit or an angel spoke to him?” And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks. Acts 23:9-10

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- For we have found this man a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world and is a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, but we seized him Acts 24:5-6
- Often the best testimony is not to avoid controversy at any cost but to graciously and humbly, yet boldly and firmly, stand up for truth, demonstrating that Jesus, and not Caesar, is Lord.

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- Salvation is ultimately a miraculous work of God, not a persuasive work of people
  - The biblical picture of conversion is not of someone carefully weighing the options and being pushed one way or the other as a result of their view of generic Christianity.
  - Rather, it is of a blind person having their eyes opened or a dead person being brought to life.
  - Conversion can only happen by an act of God and occurs in connection with the proclamation of the gospel.

# WHAT ABOUT THE “EVANGELICAL WITNESS?”

- Many of the people expressing concern about the “evangelical witness” are actually most concerned about being welcomed and treated with respect by the broader culture
- They are concerned that “evangelicals” will be viewed as strange, weird, or fringe and thus, they will lose their cultural standing
- But Christians should not be concerned with winning the approval of a world that hates God.
- We should be concerned about our personal testimony and our faithful proclamation of the gospel; we need not be concerned about some vague “evangelical witness.”



# BE PREPARED TO SUFFER

- We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy places by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come. Heb 13:10-14