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**VOL. XXX**  
**NO. 44**  
**November 1, 2015**

# Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower  
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

**—Proverbs 18:10**

## Why Does the World Hate Christians?

Throughout much of history, Christianity and persecution have gone hand in hand.

Jesus said, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you” (John 15:8). It’s stunning to think that the world could hate the sinless Prince of Peace, but they crucified Him even though Pilate could find no guilt within Him (John 19:6).

Peter and John experienced persecution every time they set foot in the city of Jerusalem; in fact, they were jailed and beaten for healing a paralyzed man (Acts 4:9–21, 5:40–42).

Paul was stoned and left for dead. He later remarked that those “who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).

Why?

Christians are rarely in power, and have little influence or riches to confiscate. Christians are a net positive to society wherever they are found, for they work hard to support their families (1 Thess. 4:12), pay their taxes (Rom. 13:7), and do not cause societal unrest (Rom. 12:18). They are good to do

business with, for they do not lie, cheat, or steal (Eph. 4:25, 28) and they keep their promises and pay their debts (Matt. 5:37). They are excellent neighbors, for they behave uprightly (1 Pet. 2:12), do not rant and rave (Eph. 4:31), keep their property clean (Rom. 12:17), and forgive easily (Matt. 6:14–15). They helpful, to a fault (Matt. 5:38–42).

In fact, in the early days of Rome's conflict with Christianity, the local official Pliny wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan asking how to proceed with a trial of Christians. But he wasn't sure how to classify their "crimes." Pliny said,

*The sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food—but ordinary and innocent food.*

And yet, Pliny had tortured and executed many, and was ready to execute many, many more. Why? Pliny should have said, "these are great people to have within the borders of Rome; we should tolerate them, if not adopt their ways." But no, he killed them.

### **The Darkness Hates the Light**

It comes down to this: the gospel upsets people.

Jesus, for example, challenged the Pharisees' conception of the Messiah. Jesus, facing the Jewish mob holding stones, said, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" (John 10:32). They replied, "for blasphemy."

The gospel is incompatible with other religions. It claims to reveal the truth, and thereby labels all other religions as false. It is not content to say, "you worship your gods, and I'll worship mine." It was when Peter and John said that Jesus was the only name given for salvation that the Jews got mad (Acts 4:12). So too for Stephen (Acts 7:54).

Well, that should be a “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” sort of thing, right? So what if someone says my god is false? “Live and let live,” right?

But it’s really only Christians who have a non-violence clause in their faith. Others are quite happy, even honor bound, to defend their religion at the point of a spear and barrel of a gun. Pliny murdered Christians because they refused to burn a pinch of incense to the Roman pantheon and worship the image of Caesar. And as for Islam, Quran 2:191 says “kill [the unbelievers] wherever you find them.” Quran 8:12 says “strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them.” Quran 9:29 says “fight those who believe not in Allah.”

But more piercing than so-called blasphemy against unseen gods could ever be, the gospel challenges people’s way of life. When Christians speak up, people of the world get offended. Ephesians 5:11 says, “do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret.” Now, God means for this to be a process of love, of “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). We know that those who practice sin cannot go to heaven (1 Cor. 6:9–11) and we want them to go, so we take the risk and speak up as faithful messengers. But oh, does it offend!

One good example is found in Mark 6:18–19. John the Baptist spoke up against Herod, saying, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” Herodias got so angry that she made Herod arrest John, and eventually murder him. Jesus said in John 7:7, “The world ... hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil.”

The gospel requires people to make a change. But, consider that other groups try to make people change, yet do not receive the horrible backlash. Vegans, for example, do their own version of vocal evangelism, but no one is crucifying vegans! What is different? Because everyone suspects that the gospel’s demand to repent *is correct!* Few people pay attention to scrawny, whiny vegans; but people can’t ignore Christians, because everyone holds a *deep seated concern that their sin is storing up the wrath of a holy God, and they do not like*

*to be reminded!* Thus the gospel message cuts to the heart in a way that other systems do not, and stir hearts to violence against it. For it is not just the voice of Christians, but “the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ... because that which is known about God is evident within them” (Rom. 1:18). Heaven itself shouts forth that adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lying, stealing, and dominating are wrong. And when one has a guilty conscience, it’s easier to strike out, than to repent.

In fact, a Christian hardly even needs to speak up to become the target of efforts to destroy him and eliminate his irritating existence. You don’t have to say, “y’all shouldn’t go to that office drinking party”; all you have to do is decline to go, and your superiors will become greatly annoyed. You don’t have to say, “y’all should be in church on Sunday morning”; all you have to do is be seen driving toward church in your Sunday clothes, and people who are mowing their lawn and loading up the golf bags will mutter under their breath, “who do those people think they are...” The very existence of a faithful Christian is a thorn in the eye of the worldly man. When he gets the power to act, he will.

### **What is the Outcome?**

We Christians must accept that this is our lot in the world. If we are to serve our Master Jesus, we will suffer ridicule and violence in this life. As it increases in intensity—as I believe it will soon do—we must learn to embrace it. Peter and John refused to quit speaking, and in fact, “went on their way ... rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). Keep holding forth the light, for there will always be a few who respond and be saved!

Jesus promises, “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10–12). It will get worse before it gets better, but glory awaits!

—*John Guzzetta*